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ABSTRACT

This collection of stories about adult second language learning includes five teachers' anecdotal accounts of experiences using the participatory process. In these accounts, the teachers describe a variety of tools and processes used in the classroom to draw out issues that can be transformed into thought-provoking discussions and language lessons. The contents are intended to stimulate other teachers to reflect on their own teaching process and explore new possibilities. The experiences are presented in four categories: getting things started; immigrant experiences; mothers and their children; and redefining learning and teaching. The appended bibliography includes: (1) reference materials for participatory curriculum development; and (2) classroom resources in the form of lesson-planning books, grammar texts, workbooks, game books, readings in prose, readings in poetry, and song, anthologies of student writing, and photograph collections. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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Talking Shop

A curriculum sourcebook for participatory adult ESL

**Andrea Nash, Ann Cason, Madeline Rhum,
Loren McGrail, and Rosario Gomez-Sanford**

**English Family Literacy Project
University of Massachusetts/Boston**

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A curriculum sourcebook for participatory adult ESL

Andrea Nash, Ann Cason, Madeline Rhum,
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English Family Literacy Project
University of Massachusetts
Boston, Massachusetts
1989

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Introduction

What Is This Book?

This book is a collection of stories about learning. The stories are accounts of experiences using participatory process, and they reflect our fears, successes, reservations, surprises, and hopes. We have all been teachers trying to do many things at once—include all participants in the shaping of the curriculum, redefine student/teacher roles, encourage critical thinking, and teach language learning skills. There is no single methodology that can address all of these goals, so we have relied on a variety of tools and techniques to help us draw out issues and turn them into thought-provoking discussions and language lessons. We present you with anecdotal accounts of how various themes came up in class, how we developed "lessons" from them, and what we learned from the experience.

Since every teaching situation is unique, these pieces are not written or intended as recipe-style instructions that can be implemented in other settings. Rather we want to share our own thinking process in developing a participatory curriculum—to share the decisions we made and the reasons we made them. We hope that, as a sourcebook, this collection can stimulate other teachers to reflect on their own teaching process and explore new possibilities.

The entries have been written by individual teachers, so that each of us has spoken with her own voice about her own experience. Readers can see the way personal teaching style affects curriculum development, the way an issue may be handled differently by each teacher, and the way various classroom settings shape the options for individual and group activities.

Who We Are

We, the five teachers who have written this book, all work in community-based adult education programs in the Boston area. The centers and participants who come to them are diverse. The centers vary in mission (from job placement to community empowerment) and in structure (from collective to hierarchial). Each center has its own recruitment and placement policies, which have resulted in classes of diverse size and make-up. Some of us had classes of six students while others had twenty. Some of us taught classes in which students shared two languages while others worked with students who shared only English as a common language. Our belief in a participatory approach has meant that the form and content of each class was unique.

Why Use a Participatory Methodology?

A fundamental premise of teaching with a participatory approach in our Family Literacy Project has been that learning and teaching are most effective when they take place in a meaningful context. A language curriculum that reflects the social and cultural realities of the students has the most relevance and is therefore more motivating for students. The first task for a teacher, then, is to find out who the students are and what they want or need to learn.

With a participatory approach a teacher begins by asking, "Who are the students? What are the daily experiences that shape their world? Why are they coming to school?" and further "What can I do to ensure that learning takes place in a context that is relevant to their lives?" None of these questions can be answered without continual dialogue between students and teacher about the issues in their lives, or about the ways in which their education does or does not help them address these issues. Very few people, however, have ever been asked to think about these connections, to share their daily concerns or to articulate their own learning needs. So a teacher must create safe and open opportunities for learners to begin this exploration. It requires that the teacher be a

careful and responsive listener, picking up on the issues that should be further explored, and letting go of the ones that won't be of interest to everyone or that may be too emotionally painful to pursue.

In an atmosphere of open communication, students and teachers learn from each other, exchange ideas and concerns, and share responsibility for how classes are going. As students enter into the process of shaping the class agenda, they take on a more equal part in decision-making and begin to redefine traditional student/teacher roles. Decisions that were once the domain of the teacher become open to negotiation—decisions such as: how curriculum content is determined, what languages are spoken in the classroom and when, how to set and enforce class groundrules, and how far to carry a sensitive issue or difficult subject. The teacher's role shifts from that of authority and sole provider of knowledge to that of facilitator, helping the participants adapt to new decision-making roles.

An integral part of participatory education is the process of curriculum development. Curriculum development does not take place in a vacuum. It does not take place before the semester begins. It is not determined by a textbook. On the contrary, curriculum development is ongoing and involves the students. They are the ones with the knowledge of the important issues in their lives. It is the role of the teacher to help make these issues explicit and then to incorporate them into materials appropriate for classroom use.

As a result of this participatory approach, the content of classes in the Family Literacy Project have varied greatly. One class has focused on very basic survival literacy skills, another on immigration and employment issues, another on documenting the experience of mothers as teachers, and a fourth on native language literacy development. There is also a class that includes pre-school children with their mothers, which grew out of the needs of parents who couldn't find daycare for their toddlers.

What is Family Literacy?

One of the difficulties that the teachers in our project have struggled with over the past several years has been how to satisfy the "family literacy" component of our grant, while at the same time maintain a participatory approach to curriculum development. During the course of this project, we have examined, re-examined and broadened our definition of family literacy.

Family literacy is often interpreted as bringing literacy activities, as schools define them, into the family setting. In this way, children are expected to do better in school and in their future work lives. This notion assumes that there is only one acceptable form of literacy and that mastery of that standard literacy is the ticket to a prosperous future.

This project supports an alternative model of family literacy, resting on different assumptions. For one, we see literacy as a range of abilities that differ in every social and cultural setting. People living in different contexts have very different purposes for literacy and therefore develop specific skills and strategies for dealing with their print world. Immigrant families bring may literacy skills with them, but these may be distinct from, and therefore unrecognized by the mainstream educational system, which labels them as "illiterate." In our work, we help adults identify their literacy strengths and support the ways they share them at home and in the world.

In addition, our experience with immigrants shows us that there are many economic, political and social barriers that keep immigrants poor. Programs that promote the message that illiteracy is the cause of poverty and, particularly, that parents with limited English literacy skills are keeping their families impoverished, put the blame on immigrant families and deny the social realities that limit the options of poor and immigrant people in this country.

Our work is designed to explore, with adult learners, their literacy needs and strengths as they define them, and together to create a curriculum that examines the barriers they face in trying to meet their own literacy goals. These barriers include health problems, lack of daycare, employment insecurity, immigration problems, and a host of other "non-literacy" concerns. Yet, it's only by integrating literacy into the solution of these daily problems that it will become a useful tool within families.

Working Together

The process of writing this book of teachers' accounts has been one of growth for each of us individually and for the group as a whole. The idea of collaborating on this work grew out of teacher sharing sessions through which we have been able to learn from, challenge and support each other in our daily work with students. This writing down of stories from the classroom has meant reflecting more on our teaching; identifying more closely with students who are working on their own writing; and evolving into a more cohesive group in order to make the writing possible.

One of the keys to turning the diversity of our classes into a project strength has been the emphasis we have maintained on teacher sharing. An essential element of the project has been the opportunity of weekly teacher sharing meetings. Every Tuesday we have come together to exchange ideas, support each other in dealing with issues that arise in the classroom, and develop curriculum. Although this time would be considered a luxury in most teachers' schedules, we view it as crucial in preventing isolation and burnout, and in reflecting on and learning from our classes. These kinds of partnerships and support networks between teachers are indispensible in any project which is not following a traditional, pre-planned curriculum model, but which is instead working to develop curriculum with students along the way. It has been this validation of our own work and reflection on issues we struggle with that led us to begin work on a book which we could share with a broader audience of teachers.

It is not easy to write clearly about what happened in an ESL class, even for an audience of teachers. To explain where the ideas for a particular lesson came from, how the lesson developed with a given group of students, and what our role as teachers were in facilitating the class, is an enormous challenge. In spite of, or perhaps because of this challenge, we have gained a great deal of perspective on our teaching styles and reasons behind them through writing about what we do. Putting our experiences down on paper, we have been forced to reflect on them as we may not have previously done. In this way, we've learned not only from each others' writings but from our own as well.

A second way in which collaborating on this project has been an enriching experience is in how it has placed us in our students' shoes, if only for a brief moment. We have discovered what a struggle it can be to write, how vulnerable it can feel to share writing with a group, and what we can learn from the critiquing and revising process. Thus we have gained some insight into what we are asking when we ask students to write.

A third way this writing has contributed to our evolution as a project is the realization it has brought us of the importance of time—time to write, to share, to value each others' work, and to work against the isolation which is traditionally a part of teaching. Too often, not enough value is given to teachers' experiences in the classroom and the time for reflection that is needed in order to assess and improve our teaching. We as teachers in the project had to carve out time during the week which had previously been taken up by business meetings. Just asserting ourselves and the idea that we understand what will help us to learn was a valuable element in our development as a collaborative.

Terms

In our writing, we have tried to be careful of the ways that we label communities and problems. For example, some people use the words "bilingual/bicultural" to refer to groups that share a common native language (i.e. Spanish) and "multilingual/multicultural" for groups made up of people from several different ethnic communities. This labeling glosses over the diverse cultural bachground that Latinos, for example, come from, and the fact that many of them are multilingual and multicultural themselves, including Indian populations whose native tongue may not be Spanish but whose identities are assumed to merge with the dominant native Spanish speakers. For this reason, we have taken care to more accurately describe the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the communities we write about.

Getting Things Started

Expressing Feelings

Teaching a true survival skill

I work on the language to express feelings early on with almost every group I teach. Since I want to build a curriculum around students' concerns and experiences, I believe I must provide students with the tools not only to report these experiences, but to interpret and react to them as well. For this reason, I consider learning to describe feelings to be very much a part of "survival" English. It is also an opportunity for people to recall and share emotional experiences if they so choose, although the lesson is not designed to be "therapeutic." In fact, there are many options for participating in ways that are safely impersonal.

We started with a pile of photographs that depict a range of emotions. I showed them to the group to elicit the words they already knew about feelings. The list was pretty long, as I had developed this vocabulary in many other lessons by discussing how story characters felt, how the students felt, etc. We learned a few new words (proud, guilty, embarrassed) when the group was stuck on a picture and didn't have the language to describe it. Since many of these pictures were curious, we spent a lot of time puzzling over the images and making our own associations.

At this, and many other points along the way, we stopped to hear people's memories. Since we didn't yet know each other very well, the stories were a fascinating introduction to our classmates. Sometimes I use these memories to skip the entire middle portion of the lesson and get to writing. But this time, knowing that we would get there, I continued on with activities that past students had enjoyed very much.

The activities were designed to use the new vocabulary in the sentence pattern "I feel ____ when ____" by matching two sets of cards to build sentences. The first set were the "I feel *x*" statements and the second set were causes or situations that began with "when . . ." At first, the "I feel" cards were mounted around the room. I held up the "when" cards one at a time and the students read

I feel happy	I feel depressed	when I get a raise	when I hear salsa music
I feel excited	I feel lonely	when I have to speak English on the phone	when my son won't speak Spanish
I feel afraid	I feel worried	when my kids interpret for me	when I can't find a job
I feel proud	I feel angry	when I talk about my country	when men talk to me on the street

them together, collaborated in interpreting them, and then called out feelings they believed would be evoked by such a situation. For example, for the card, "when my mother calls me," students said they felt "sad," "happy," "surprised," "lonely," and "excited," and then shared the parts of their lives that explained their responses. Most people could relate to most of the situations, and there was lots of oohing and ahhing as they recognized familiar predicaments. Everyone was eager to express their reactions to each card, and searched for the new words that could help them convey their feelings.

To make sure the activity didn't force an uncomfortable intimacy, I included many options for creating less revealing sentences such as "I feel *x* when it snows." There were also included many sentences that described our classroom experience: "I feel *x* when we speak Spanish in class," "I feel *x* when everyone comes to class on time," or " I feel *x* when class is over," and in this way we could discuss our positive and negative feelings about the only experience that we all, universally, shared—our class time together. This was especially important to me, as the classroom is the only place I can give students a forum for voicing their needs and dissatisfactions, and practice in negotiating creative alternatives. These often-neglected life skills help people act in their outside lives.

Next, we took down the "I feel" cards and replaced them with the "when" cards. To reinforce the vocabulary and group sentence building, I handed out the "I feel" cards and asked students, individually, to browse around and match their cards to the "when" cards on the wall. Finally, everyone wrote their own sentences from scratch, borrowing from the phrases on the cards. Here is some of what they wrote about feeling "worried," "happy," and "confident."

I feel happy when
I am with my
children.

I feel happy when
I understand.

I feel happy when
I work.

I feel happy when
I finish work.

I feel happy when
I speak on the
phone to my child.

I feel worried when
I can't understand
English.

I feel worried when
I don't have letters
from my country.

I feel worried when
my children are sick.

I feel worried when
I speak English on
the phone.

I feel worried when
I don't have money.

I feel confident when
people understand me.

I feel confident when
I speak English on
the street.

I feel confident when
I make a lot of
friends at work.

This short sample pretty clearly illustrates what the common pressing concerns were. The group learned how similarly they felt about many things, and people identified strongly with one another. My role in the discussion just about faded away. I had started out matching cards and writing sentences with everyone else. But the most compelling worries and joys that people wanted to talk about were not ones I shared — they were about the anxieties that stem from poverty and not understanding the dominant language. I became a listener, noting the issues that we could address in future classwork.

In this particular class, I did not ask people to write more about the experiences and feelings they had shared, although this is usually a very effective follow-up activity. Instead, since we had just

read a story about a homesick newcomer, the class went on to write about how they felt when they first came to this country (or other memories of choice).

There are an infinite number of directions this lesson can take. Using an action-oriented, problem-posing approach, one follow-up to the original sentences might be to ask, for example, "What do you *do* when you feel worried/afraid/proud/ etc. about *x*? The answers to this question can be left as discussion or, depending on level, written up as sentences, LEAs, or individually written stories. The further question, "What else can you do?" can be used to develop critical thinking and group support for making change. Or, we can simply write the full stories that were called to mind when we wrote our brief sentences or heard the memories of others.

I find the unit on feelings to be a no-lose endeavor. It involves a lot of language work while stimulating rich content from the students. We can all participate on any level of intimacy and still be fully involved. And, best of all, it brings the class a long way in terms of getting to know one another and becoming a supportive, connected group.

A.N.

Immigrant Experiences

Happy Families?

Using the Language Experience Approach

The following is an account of how I used pictures of families to generate language and develop literacy skills. I used the Language Experience Approach along with more structured grammar exercises to accomplish this. This cycle of activities has proven over time to be a very effective way to get students to generate language at a deeper, more thoughtful level than their skills in English might first allow. The use of the pictures provided a backdrop for us to discuss such important issues as: What is happiness? What is wealth? Are these things different in different cultures? Is having money equivalent to being happy? Are people really richer here in the U.S.? Is it better to be rich or happy?

I have used these pictures over and over again in a variety of ways with a variety of students. However, I have used them primarily with low-level students at the end of my unit on "Family" as a way for them to pull together all the vocabulary items they have learned and use them in a context that is new and in which they feel they have something meaningful to say. In a sense, the LEA became a kind of evaluative tool for me to see how much they had taken in, where we still needed to work (what grammar structures), and where they wanted to go (what structures or issues they wanted to pursue).

In choosing the pictures, I felt it was important not to have stereotypical pictures of poor and destitute people from either country. Instead, I purposefully looked for two pictures that showed people smiling but from very different cultures. The pictures were going to be used as a kind of code so they had to be open for interpretation.

I purposefully did not design a set of problem-posing questions to go with the pictures because I wanted to see how they would read these images without my guidance. I wanted to give them the option of staying in a more labeling or describing mode or to go into a more critical one. I wanted to know if a code could stand by itself without all those probing questions. What I discovered was that yes, the pictures could stand alone but it depended on the makeup of the class as to whether they chose to go deeper. It also depended on the level of English since this was not a bilingual class. The following are two LEAs that show what I am talking about.

There are nine people in the family.
There are eleven turkeys.
There are five children.
The father is happy.
He is tall and a little fat.
He is smiling because he is together with his family.
It is warm.
They are from Central America.
The children are students.
The father is a farmer.
They are poor.

Happiness

Both families are happy. The family from South America is happy because they are together and because the sun is shining. Also they have some turkeys. They are poor but happy. The family from the U.S. is happy because they have money. They are middle class. Maybe the father has a good job. Maybe he is a teacher or a foreman in a company. His wife is happy because he has a good job. Both families are happy but for different reasons.

The stories, though different in terms of content and level of English, show the importance of the relationship between being happy and being "together." In both classes, after answering some questions about the texts, I asked the students to answer the question, "What makes you happy?" Some of their answers are as follows:

I am happy because my wife is working.
I am happy when it rains.
I am happy when my daughter laughs.
I am happy when my son has a vacation.

The class that wrote the LEA titled "Happiness" was the class that had a debate about whether or not the farmer was rich or poor. The class was divided on this. Some of my Central American students tried to explain to the Puerto Rican students that having turkeys made him a rich campesino. The Puerto Ricans countered, however, that he was still a campesino. They also disagreed about whether or not the "Gringo family" was wealthy or not. Some said that because he was wearing a sweater he probably wasn't a doctor or lawyer but maybe just a teacher or foreman. Hence, they were middle class, though probably they would be considered upper class in their countries. There are two important points I would like to make about how this discussion went and how it got transcribed. The first is that a lot of discussion happened in Spanish and that I did ask some clarifying questions as they talked before I wrote. In both classes I let them talk first, then transcribed. Because I know some Spanish and because I allowed people to translate their ideas from Spanish into English and supplied necessary vocabulary when needed, like "middle class," the transcriptions are both a reflection of what they wanted to say and how they said it. We did go back over them together and they corrected most of their errors. I made up questions and blank fill exercises to follow the story to develop their literacy skills and work on some structures, but for me and I think for most of the students, the real learning was listening to each others' different views and learning how to express them in English.

L.M.

Working with Beginning Level Students

It is hard to imagine how a participatory approach would work with a beginning level class. Teachers often assume that the lower the level of the class, the less the students can contribute to making decisions about what should take place during class time. Assumptions about the learners' abilities and interests are made, often unconsciously, because of the limited shared language with which to exchange ideas and thoughts. With beginning level learners teachers can most easily fall into patronizing and controlling behavior. When using very carefully simplified language to communicate, one sometimes forgets that we are among adults with very full lives; that these are people who most likely have endured tremendous hardship during their lives, and whose lives are rich with experiences that demonstrate a great deal of knowledge and wisdom about the world. Unlike more advanced students, beginners almost always blame themselves and their own perceived stupidity (which the workaday world constantly reconfirms to them) for their slow progress in English. Rarely is the teacher anything but praiseworthy in their eyes. It seems that the teacher clearly knows everything and the students don't know very much of anything. Such myths will undermine learning by any approach.

In fact there are times that a participatory approach doesn't work: when there isn't enough common language to determine collaboratively the direction of the class. There are many instances, however, when students' interests and concerns can be brought out and built upon. With carefully thought out language activities, clear and simple questioning and focused listening, students' beginning language can be used to convey meaning about the things in their lives that are important to them. In thinking about using a participatory approach, the teacher needs to take extra care in examining her role and her ideas about who her students are. It is important to recognize people's skills and knowledge of non-school-related aspects of life.

Once a teacher has decided that she wants to use a participatory approach with her beginning students, the question remains, "How do I do it?" The accounts that follow give many examples of possible ways to answer this question.

No Green Card, No Good Pay

Building curriculum around immigration problems

There are very few good materials for low level classes. I'm constantly looking through books, both traditional ESL texts as well as nontraditional materials, for stories or exercises to use with my class. The most effective materials, however, are those that the students and I make together.

One such collaboration is our weekly newspaper. On Monday night our first activity is to write their "news" on pieces of newsprint. The topics vary: sometimes they talk about their weekends, other times they talk about the political situation in their countries. We read the newsprint together and make changes if necessary. I type up the things we write for our next class on Wednesday night. Sometimes I include exercises at the end such as a cloze or questions based on text.

On Monday, I came into class and people were talking about money and the high cost of living in Boston. They were speaking in Creole as they always are before class starts. I listened for awhile and interjected some comments in English. I was trying in an indirect way to steer the discussion into English. The discussions continued in Creole, and why not? Money is a serious concern and they can communicate best with each other in Creole. Our class newspaper, however, brought together the important issue of financial survival and communication in English. In other words, it provided a vehicle for joining meaningful content with practice of English literacy skills. I put up the newsprint and wrote "MONEY" at the top of the page. I wrote down the discussion that was taking place primarily between two women.

On Wednesday, I gave everyone a copy of the newspaper to which I had added four discussion questions:

> Before, how much rent did you pay when you came to Boston?
> Now, how much rent do you pay?
> Before, how much money did you get paid?
> Now, how much money do you get paid?

We made two charts on the blackboard showing everyone's rent and wages. Most of the rents showed increases between then and now, and most of the wages made by class members were roughly equivalent. Two people's wages were outstandingly low, however, and we questioned them about that. It turned out that they worked in the same hotel about an hour north of the city. They complained about their low pay, and said that the hotel they worked for has a branch in Cambridge that pays quite well. We questioned them about continuing at their current jobs: didn't they want to find new jobs or at least transfer to the Cambridge location? We found out then that these two people didn't have green cards. They felt safe staying at their current jobs, but trapped in making any moves for the future. With this information we entered into a new stage of trust and openness. They shared a fear and frustration that they carry with them from morning to night. I wanted them to know that I was aware that they had shared with me, a non-Haitian, in English, a very important part of their lives. After some discussion in two languages, I wrote a story on newsprint about their predicament. We read the story, and everyone agreed that this is a very important story and one that must be told.

I typed up the story for the following class. I also made a scrambled words game with sentences from the story. I wrote one word on a card and the students had to put them in the right order. I gave them a worksheet with the same scrambled sentences exercise and another one with a cloze.

GOOD NEWS NEWSPAPER MARCH 22,1989

cccccc$MONEY$ccccc$c

MARIE-ANNETTE SAID,

"EVERYTHING IN AMERICA IS EXPENSIVE NOW."

"IN 1981 HOUSE IS CHEAPER."

BEFORE, SHE LIVED IN CENTRAL SQUARE ON WESTERN AVE.

SHE HAD 2½ BEDROOMS AND A BIG KITCHEN.

SHE PAID $140.

BOSTON ARPARTMENTS ARE THE MOST EXPENSIVE IN THE USA.

MARIE-JEAN SAID,

BOSTON IS EXPENSIVE BECAUSE IT GOT WORK."

MARIE-ANNETTE SAID,

"HOUSE EXPENSIVE. EVERYTHING EXPENSIVE,

BUT JOBS DON'T PAY WELL."

MARIE-JEAN SAID,

JOBS PAY WELL: $7, $8, $9.

MARIE-ANNETTE SAID,

"HOUSE GOES UP.EVERYTHING GOES UP.

JOBS GO UP. BUT NOT ENOUGH.
cccccccccccccccccccccccccccc$c

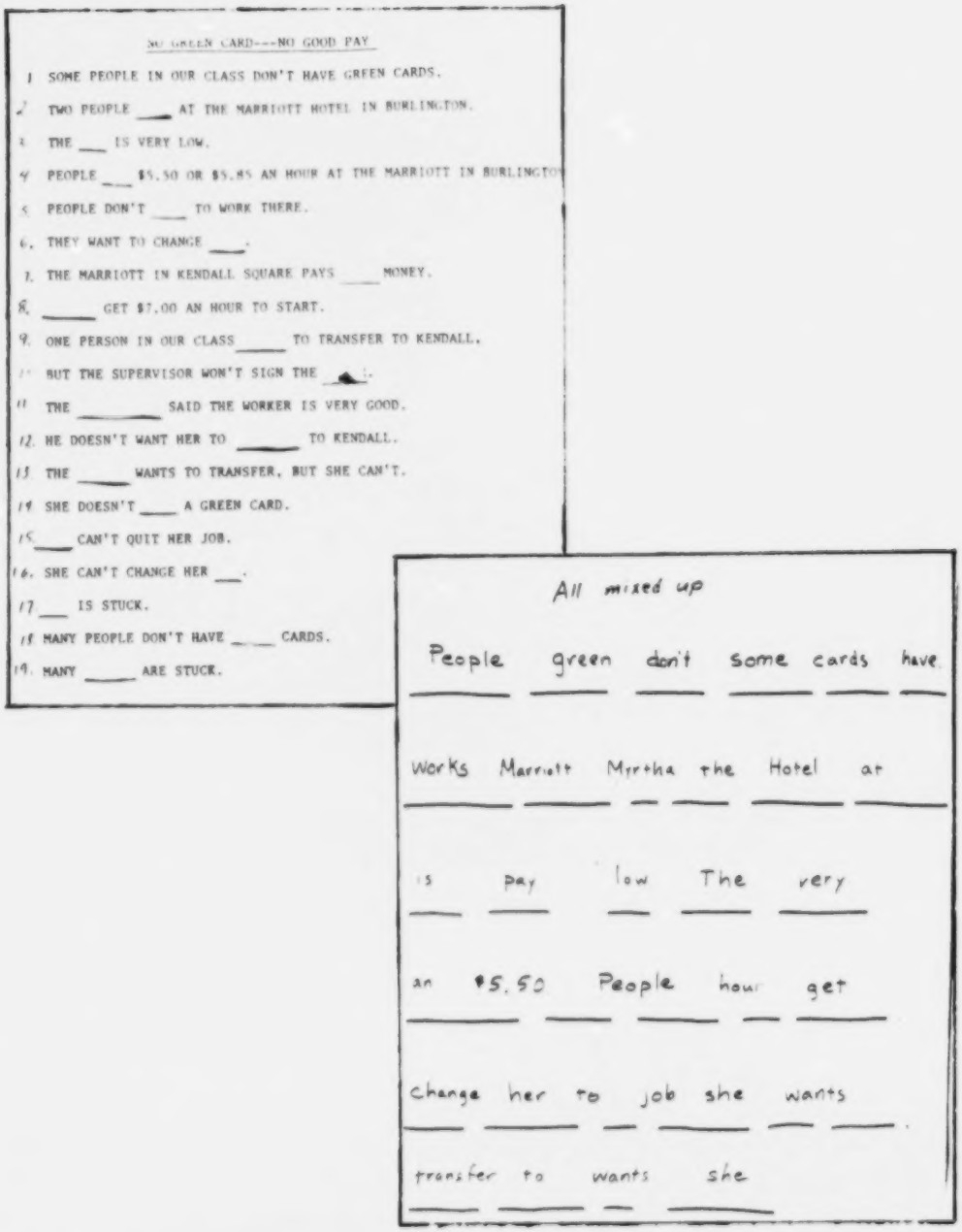
WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT MONEY?

BEFORE, HOW MUCH RENT DID YOU PAY WHEN YOU CAME TO BOSTON?

NOW, HOW MUCH RENT DO YOU PAY?

BEFORE, HOW MUCH MONEY DID YOU GET PAID?

NOW, HOW MUCH MONEY DO YOU GET PAID?



NO GREEN CARD---NO GOOD PAY

1 SOME PEOPLE IN OUR CLASS DON'T HAVE GREEN CARDS.
2 TWO PEOPLE ___ AT THE MARRIOTT HOTEL IN BURLINGTON.
3 THE ___ IS VERY LOW.
4 PEOPLE ___ $5.50 OR $5.85 AN HOUR AT THE MARRIOTT IN BURLINGTO
5 PEOPLE DON'T ___ TO WORK THERE.
6. THEY WANT TO CHANGE ___.
7. THE MARRIOTT IN KENDALL SQUARE PAYS ___ MONEY.
8. ___ GET $7.00 AN HOUR TO START.
9. ONE PERSON IN OUR CLASS ___ TO TRANSFER TO KENDALL.
10 BUT THE SUPERVISOR WON'T SIGN THE ___.
11 THE ___ SAID THE WORKER IS VERY GOOD.
12. HE DOESN'T WANT HER TO ___ TO KENDALL.
13 THE ___ WANTS TO TRANSFER, BUT SHE CAN'T.
14 SHE DOESN'T ___ A GREEN CARD.
15 ___ CAN'T QUIT HER JOB.
16. SHE CAN'T CHANGE HER ___.
17 ___ IS STUCK.
18 MANY PEOPLE DON'T HAVE ___ CARDS.
19. MANY ___ ARE STUCK.

All mixed up

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an $5.50 People hour get

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What made this series of classes so special to me was that both parties involved (the students and the teacher) gained significantly in the sharing of real life concerns. I felt good that my students could talk to me about an issue that is deeply personal and which they know I will never have to address in my own life. They know that I listened to them and that their words are important to someone who is in fundamental ways on the outside. The language activities reinforced the importance of their experiences and the sharing of stories reaffirmed the strength of bonds across the boundaries.

M.R.

"Women Are Humans, Too"
Addressing sexism in the workplace

We had been focusing on the topic of work for a couple of weeks. We had made charts that included everyone's job title, place of employment, their boss's name, something good about their boss and something bad about their boss. We got some language practice from this chart. People made sentences, both orally and in writing, about work. I wanted people to examine their work situations with a more critical eye, but this activity was not successful in bringing out their work-related concerns. They could talk about good, bad, tired and hard, but they didn't want to go much beyond that.

Most of the students are housekeepers so we focused on the vocabulary used to describe that job. We worked with the simple present tense as our grammar focus. I wrote a cloze exercise for practice of the new vocabulary:

Marie is a housekeeper.
She works at Howard Johnson's.
She works hard every day.
She cleans _____ rooms.
She washes _____ sinks.
She vacuums _____.
She _____ bathtubs.
Etc.

They decided that our fictional Marie was responsible for cleaning eighteen rooms, eighteen sinks, eighteen carpets and so on. This brought us to a comparison of how many rooms each of them had to clean. We discovered that there was a wide range of responsibilities from place to place.

The students brought up the enormous amount of work that they do each day, and how exhausted they feel at the end of the day. To dig a little deeper into the issue of the exhausting work expected of them, I decided to spend half of each class on a reading about the workplace, and devote the other half of the class to grammar practice with have/has and the vocabulary of various benefits. The purpose of this grammatical exercise was to compare the benefits that people received or didn't receive at work.

On large flashcards, I wrote commonly known benefits: health insurance, dental insurance, coffee breaks, sick days, vacation, union, good boss, good hours. I also brought blank cards to class so I could add any other benefits that the students came up with. We added: credit union, life insurance, and pay for school (tuition reimbursement). We used the actual situations of class members to practice this vocabulary in standard substitution, transformation and question and answer drills. They had worksheets with this same vocabulary and sentence structures for homework.

As a reading I took a story from the book *Come With Me*, called "Women Are Humans Too". The story was written by a child about his mother's work situation. The language is fairly simple, but it is not written "down" for beginning ESL students, so we needed many warm-up exercises before actually reading the story. These preliminary steps gave the students a lot of rehearsal with the story before being asked to read it. I wrote the title of the story on the blackboard and we talked about what the word "human" meant, and then the title as a whole. Next we talked about the picture that accompanies the story. As they talked, I wrote their descriptions on the blackboard.

After they had finished we read everything on the blackboard together. This familiarized them with some of the words they would find in the story. I told them that the story was about immigrants from Portugal who now live in Canada. We talked about Portuguese people they knew from work and about Canada. They knew it was a place that provided good aid (public assistance, health insurance) but had few jobs. I read the story aloud a couple of times before giving the text to them. The first time I read it straight through, and the second time interspersed with questions to check their comprehension. All these preparatory steps were very helpful to them as a group of beginning readers.

Before class, I had written out the story on newsprint, one sentence to a page. We read the story together, sentence by sentence from the pieces of big paper. I handed out one piece of big paper to each person. As I read the story for the third time, pausing after each sentence, the person holding that sentence taped it to the blackboard. The group reread each sentence as it went up on the blackboard, and then again after the entire story was up on the blackboard. We went through the story for vocabulary and comprehension. We practiced briefly with "should" (When you feel very sick, where should you go? You should go to the doctor, etc.). People explained things to each other in Creole. I would ask questions after their exchanges to make sure that everyone was clear on the material.

This story brings out issues of discrimination in the workplace, and people in the class laughed and sighed in recognition of this situation of inequality. Two women told of the situations at their jobs which were similar to the one in the story. Another woman talked about some men making more than women at her workplace, but as we discussed her situation, we determined that the men she was talking about had seniority over the women who were making less money. I learned that the men usually operate the floor buffer which is heavier than the machines used by the women, and the poeple understand that as the reason for their higher wages. Men typically are responsible for cleaning fewer rooms than women, but still receive higher wages.

For the following class I wrote up the previous night's discussion. We read this report together. This type of write-up is a very effective literacy tool, giving validation in print of their experiences and ideas. A couple of people were concerned about having their names in the report. We talked about who would see this paper, and if it could get anyone in trouble. We decided that the write-up should only be used in the class. We talked more about discrimination. They seemed resigned to the fact that discrimination exists, and that as women they would be victims of it.

We were now at an important point in the discussion and the lesson. Either I could let the issue rest and view it as a lesson where their experiences of workplace discrimination were acknowledged, or I could push the discussion along and try to have people explore their understanding about the causes of economic inequalities between men and women. I opted for the latter because I felt that a feeling of helplessness would linger otherwise.

I decided to do an LEA class writing. I asked them, "Why do men get more money?" Their answers came quickly and easily, mostly noting the economic responsibilities that men have to their families. There were several single mothers in the class, so I asked if these women didn't have the same economic pressures and responsibilities as men. Then they told me that not only did women have many of the same responsibilities as men but, in addition, had also to take care of children. We read the LEA together and cleared up any questions about it. Those people who knew more English than others helped out with translation when necessary. I reorganized and wrote up this LEA as a reading for the following class.

In preparation for the class, I found out some information about the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). In very simple language I wrote an

explanation of the act and of EEOC both on newsprint and on 8″ × 11″ paper. In the next class we reread the LEA and again people seemed to be resigned to the situation. At that point, I presented the information about the Act and EEOC. We read the information from the newsprint several times and very slowly. They asked about how to find EEOC, so I brought the telephone book into class and I found the number for them to copy. At that point, we wrote a dialogue to practice calling EEOC. We practiced the dialogue first as a group and then in pairs.

This series of lessons was different for me, because it was one of the first times that I encouraged and expected my beginning level students to share their work-related feelings and experiences. I relied on their responses to the reading passage and to each other's experiences for direction in forming the lesson. I was not sure how much to push what were sometimes difficult issues. I found that taking risks with both the content and the level of difficulty of the material paid off when there was ample preparation. Also important to the success of this lesson was the combination of grammar, vocabulary and content. Even though the students' discussions were sometimes in their native language, they practiced English in all skill areas and used English to communicate about important issues.

M.R.

Images and Stereotypes
Opening the Discussion

In a multicultural classroom, and especially a classroom to which we are striving to bring real-life issues, stereotypes emerge in many languages and in both subtle and blatant ways. For me, it is difficult but key in any group to address some of the preconceptions we have of different cultures, races, and genders. The following is a lesson which enabled one class to talk about stereotypes.

I had chosen the short story "Those Who Don't" by Sandra Cisneros as a way to enter into a discussion of communities and neighborhoods. It is beautiful and difficult because of its unusual language and I was concerned it might be a little overwhelming to students:

The House on Mango Street

Those Who Don't

Those who don't know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we're dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives. They are stupid people who are lost and got here by mistake.

But we aren't afraid. We know the guy with the crooked eye is Davey the Baby's brother, and the tall one next to him in the straw brim, that's Rosa's Eddie V. and the big one that looks like a dumb grown man, he's Fat Boy, though he's not fat anymore nor a boy.

All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight. Yeah. That is how it goes and goes.

by Sandra Cisneros

The class loved it, and I found that I had underestimated them. It was easy to visualize a crooked eye, to draw a straw brim, and we could all act out "our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled-up tight." We read the story and I passed out one question on a notecard to pairs of students in order to give them time to check their comprehension and share their different interpretations of the story with each other:

Who are "those who don't" ?
Why do "they think we will attack them with shiny knives"?
Why does the writer say "we aren't afraid."?
What does the last line of the story mean?
How do you feel in a "neighborhood of another color"?
Are there neighborhoods in Boston where you never go?

Students then came back into a large group and shared their questions and their understandings of the story and why people are scared to venture into neighborhoods of another color. Students almost immediately began to mention places around Boston where they were afraid to go. Dorchester and Roxbury were high on the list of forbidden neighborhoods though few students had spent time in these parts of the city. I asked how people knew what areas of town were like. "Friends," "People say things," "T.V.," "News," were the replies. Some people said that it was most important to know an area before you go into it. Other people spoke of problems they had experienced in Allston, our own neighborhood, including muggings and break-ins. One student mentioned that we would not go into an area where only black people live. In response to this, another student said it isn't people's skin color but level of education that is important. A woman from El Salvador disagreed. She said that educated people are not always good people, either; that in her country it was some of the most formally-educated people who were the most corrupt. I again raised the question of where we get our thoughts and ideas about what people, and especially what groups of people are like, particularly if we don't come into contact with people different from ourselves. Again the response was "People tell me," "TV," and "The papers."

For the next class I decided to bring in some pictures from magazines that portray stereotypes of certain groups of people/cultures. I did not have to search very far for examples. I looked in magazines and ripped out some pages. I came to class and wrote the word "stereotypes" on the board. Almost everyone believed it to be another word for cassette, but we talked about generalizations and with examples people caught on to the idea. I then passed out the ads from the magazines and asked students to work in small groups to talk about stereotypes of people that were reflected in the ad and why stereotypes are used:

A Gringo's Guide To
Mexican Dining
and Carne Asado con Arroz.
Authentic tastes like Taco de
Cameron Classico. Add Tequila
drinks, Nacho appetizers, and
Make it Mexican!
Now through November 8th.
All entrées under $10.
Even if you're a "gringo,"
you don't have to go all
the way across the Rio
Grande for the tastes of
Old Mexico. You can
get them at J.B.
Winberie, now
"Women
Can't
Manage
Money."
NORTHWEST
NORTHWEST AIRLINES
Come Feel The Warmth Of Mexico

Looking at the particular ads that I brought in, a Chinese woman talked about images of Asian women as shy all the time, and that the woman on the Northwest Airlines ad is a woman made up for theater, not an ordinary woman. There was quite a debate about the ad that says "women can't manage money" with one man in the class insisting it is true but not holding up against the arguments of very capable women. From this discussion emerged students' experiences of stereotypes of their own cultures. An older Chinese woman had been told that Chinese people were loud on the subway and that Northamericans were annoyed by them. She wanted to know if we thought it was true. A man from Guatemala talked about stereotypes of Central Americans, among both other Latinos and Northamericans, as guerillas or as uneducated. A man from Colombia said that people react to information that he is a Colombian by making references to cocaine and other drugs. Students also talked about their perceptions of Northamericans before they came to the U.S. (rich, crazy, "loose" women).

We didn't get out all the stereotypes we hold or experience, or fully discuss where they come from, but we began to talk about some erroneous images we pick up from each other from everyday life, especially from the TV and other media, and how we feel when we're placed in a category. We talked about the value of getting to know people as individuals. We also began to build a common vocabulary around stereotypes, generalizations and fear, and differences which I believe enabled us to talk a little more openly of our own differences throughout the cycle.

As I continue to work with this issue in the class, I would like to ask the students to do the research on the media for stereotypes, images which they believe to be false or overgeneralizations. I'd also like to work on some writing about this topic to reflect upon with the same class and with others. Over time and many ESL cycles, my opinion of the best way to deal with stereotypes as they arise in class has changed. When I first began to teach ESL, I tried to assume a neutral or basically "non-person" stance. My theory was that I shouldn't intrude in the classroom, influence the students or impose my views on them. This attitude has since transformed. I have realized that by removing myself from a discussion I don't remove myself from my position of authority, but perhaps reinforce it by using the veil of "objectivity." Now I am less hesitant not only to confront by bringing them back to the class as a story, questions, or an activity to elicit students' own experiences, but to share my own opinions and experiences and stereotypes as well.

A.C.

Tools and Techniques

Participatory education is a process where teachers and students educate one another. This exchange can only take place if the tools and techniques facilitating the process are also in themselves participatory.

Tools and techniques have been the source of much discussion and research in our teacher-sharing. We discussed them by sharing the particular concerns or life issues being addressed in the classroom and then examining how particular tools and techniques could facilitate a discussion of that issue. The importance and relevance of these tools and techniques, however, is determined by the socio-cultural context both in and outside the classroom. The discussion of which tools and techniques worked best with a particular theme was supplemented by readings about other teachers' experiences or, at times, by what the "experts" said in the literacy journals. Our reflections on the use of different tools and techniques, such as language experience stories, oral histories, and interviews were enriched when we also wrote about our experiences. The discussions, the readings and the writing about our teaching experiences led us to create, at times, new tools and to have a deeper understanding of the techniques we were using.

Based on all these considerations we recommend that teachers view every tool and technique, first and above all, within the context that it is used. The tools and techniques used in participatory education are not in themselves recipes for education. Our experiences as teachers have taught us to view them within the context of the class and the life issues being addressed in the classroom.

Oral Histories

Learning from each others' lives

I teach in several multi-cultural ESL classes which include students from a wide range of educational and economic backgrounds. One of my classes is also multi-level in terms of English proficiency and I'm always searching for ways in which some small bridges can be built across language skills, cultures and classes so that students and I as the teacher can learn from our diversity. Some tools which have facilitated this kind of exchange came out of workshops on using oral history in the classroom.

After attending two oral history workshops with Cindy Cohen of the Cambridge Oral History Project, I wanted to experiment with studying oral histories in my ESL classes. When I ask students at different points throughout a cycle to recommend themes for the class, they often ask to study about history or "U.S. culture." Sharing personal and family histories is one way to validate each student's experience as a part of real history and to validate their cultures as one important facet of "U.S. culture." It is also a dynamic way in which to practice English communication skills.

The following is an account of how we used these interviews in an intermediate ESL class. The process includes modeling the technique and incorporating language activities into the interviewing process.

When we began this activity in the intermediate class, we had been working on the present perfect tense. We reviewed this tense by playing a guessing game with objects I had brought into the classroom. I asked students to brainstorm questions which they could ask in the present perfect to discover what the objects (hidden in a bag) were. Examples of some of the students' questions were:

Have you used this object?
When have you used it?
Where have you used it?
Have you used it alone or with other people?

Students began by asking me questions about a selected object, trying to guess its identity. Then I was replaced by students as the fielder of questions.

I wanted to use this game as a grammar review, to spice up the class, and as a model for more in-depth interviewing techniques. The next step was to elicit important objects from students' own lives. The object should be something that they have owned for a long time. I explained that each student would be interviewed by the class about the object they brought in. This is a great, non-threatening way to focus on students' lives and backgrounds without relying on the written word.

Not all students brought in something. Some people possess very few things that they have had for a long time. Others perhaps didn't understand, or had trouble thinking of an object. The objects that people did bring, however, made for very rich classes and involved all students. A woman from Taiwan brought in a Jade ring that a friend of hers who moved from Taiwan to Japan fifteen years before had given to her. The ring is very important to her and grows more so with time as she is in her mid-sixties. With each passing year the possibility that she'll see her friend again grows more and more remote. Students asked her questions about the ring, about her friendship, about moving away from friends, and about growing older.

A man from Mexico brought in his guitar, which he had owned for about eight years. He played for the class and said he will play as long as he is able. A woman from Santo Domingo brought in

the last letter which her father wrote to her before he died in 1975. She read the letter to the class (it was framed) and talked about her relationship with her father. She said that he always spoiled her and that when she was a child he used to bring her grapes before she went to sleep.

Two brothers from El Salvador brought in photos of themselves with their father. What struck the class most about this photo was how the younger brother had grown up in the year since the photo was taken, how difficult it would be for his family to see him so changed.

The response of other students varied. Mostly, people were excited, spilling over with questions about unfamiliar objects and experiences, or recounting their own tales, memories and experiences which were sparked by other students' stories. I do think it is a risky experience for students to bring in such a piece of themselves, and one which works best in a group which knows and feels comfortable with each other (not at the beginning of a class cycle). I also think that in classes in which I brought in an object myself to model the activity, this worked better, because people could see that something important might be a photograph or a very simple Godseye or a quilt, something not extraordinary.

Reflecting upon this class, I think the next time I would like to ask students to write up their own or another student's story about their possessions. Other suggestions have been that students make a book of oral histories, or that we take polaroid snapshots of each other with whatever we bring in to have a starting point for writing. It is also important to note that I have used this technique in a beginning class, one which included many literacy students. The lesson was no less inspiring at a beginning level. Objects as varied as a matroushka (dolls inside dolls) from Russia and a pilon (mortar and pestle) from Haiti allowed students to really become the experts and to discover some common aspects of their cultures they hadn't shared before. It also gave them a window onto aspects of each other's lives in their home countries which they hadn't been able to convey using only words.

A.C.

Traffic Tickets

Low level students use literacy in the real world

In a participatory classroom it's important to establish an atmosphere of openness and sharing. People in the class have to feel that their issues, concerns and ideas are valued by others in the class before they will be willing to talk about them. Depending on the individuals in the class it can take anywhere from a couple of weeks to a couple of months to build this trust among members of the class. I will generally spend the first fifteen minutes or so of class just chatting with people about what's going on in their lives or in current events. Through these informal conversations, I often get ideas of topics that we can later explore with a reading, or about an issue that calls for immediate attention.

An example of using a student's concern as the content for a literacy lesson occurred when a student brought a traffic ticket to class which he did not understand. He told the class about the tickets he had gotten recently. One of them was a parking ticket; the other, a moving violation. It was the latter of the two that confused him. He brought the ticket to class because he wanted to pay it but did not know how to do so. I looked at the ticket and was not sure either. The extremely small print on the back of the ticket that is intended to explain the process for payment is written in legalese and was of no help. Other members of the class asked him about the circumstances when he got the ticket. As it turned out, he was not sure what he had done wrong and when he asked the police officer to explain the problem to him, he was ignored. We looked at the ticket, and the reason for issuing the ticket was not at all clear. As people asked more questions he supplied more details about the incident, as well as what he thought the reasons were for receiving the ticket. Other students talked about times they or their friends had gotten tickets. Several important issues emerged from this discussion: 1) racial discrimination, 2) illiteracy, 3) the difficulties of having limited English ability, and 4) quotas for ticketing.

For the following class I wrote up the day's discussion as a reading. This generated further discussion about problems people had in dealing with the police. After several minutes I suggested to the class that we could write a letter to the police commissioner or to the newspapers about these problems. Everyone thought this was a good idea. We talked about who to send it to and they decided that the newspaper would be better because many people would read it and gain some understanding about the problems facing immigrants. We spent part of the class writing a language experience story in order to generate ideas about why we wanted to write this letter and what we wanted to say.

The next day, two members of the class who had been absent earlier in the week returned and objected to the letter writing. They felt that the letter accused the police of discrimination and that such a thing didn't exist except with a very few ignorant individuals. Some of the others felt strongly that there were problems of discrimination, particularly in Boston. After a rather heated discussion, everyone agreed to participate in the writing of the letter. The dissenters' decision to join the group may have been based on wanting to support their classmate rather than an indication that they were acknowledging that discrimination exists on a societal level.

We reviewed the LEA from the previous day, and then continued writing down peoples' ideas. This time I tried to direct their comments by asking leading questions, such as: "What was wrong with the way the police officer was with Gebre?" and "What do you think the police should do in situations like this?"

The LEAs from the two days were not in any kind of logical order, so the next step was to organize them. I wanted to be very careful at this point to help the students write a strong letter

without imposing my idea of form and structure onto their work. For the next class I rewrote each sentence on a separate strip of newsprint. I introduced three categories for the students to put the sentences: 1) this is the problem, 2) why we have this problem, and 3) change (fix) the problem. The students read each sentence and decided together whether it was a one, two or a three. After all the sentences were placed, we reread them and edited out the repetitions and added an introduction and a closing.

It was very exciting for me to see them collaborating on this critical thinking and editorial process. The better readers could read the sentences, and everyone, reader and non-reader alike, could participate in making the decisions about where a sentence sounded best and made sense. After they finished the editing process I numbered each strip so I could remember the order and typed up the letter.

I brought the letter to class the next day. Everyone was proud of their work. Some people, however, were afraid to sign the letter because of feared recriminations. We talked about their fear and about the different ways police behave in different countries. In the end, people were assured about the safety of publicly voicing this kind of complaint, and everyone signed the letter.

M.R.

Barbara and Ana

Literacy and critical thinking about our daily lives

The writings about Barbara and Ana grew out of a spontaneous class discussion about Spanish-speakers being told in public, by Americans, not to use their native Spanish. We had been learning the vocabulary used to describe feelings and students were practicing that vocabulary by describing how they felt when they spoke English (their list included: nervous, proud, anxious, afraid, worried and happy). The story that later became the "At the Store" story began as a whispered side conversation between two students during that activity. When I asked them to share their conversation with everyone, they proceeded to tell a story of Anglo arrogance and racism. Everyone wanted to hear and understand the details, so we listened to their story in Spanish and talked for awhile about racism and Anglos' fear of immigrants.

The next class, I brought in the story, written in English, as a dialogue between an American woman and a Latina woman. We read it in pairs and made sure everyone understood the language. The last line of the dialogue was left blank to give students the opportunity to have the last word in this confrontation.

At the Store

Ana: Marcos, tienes que limpiar tu cuarto

Barbara: Excuse me. We only speak English here.

Ana: I sorry. I no speak English.

Barbara: This is America. You should speak English if you want to live here.

Ana: ¿Que cosa? I no understand.

Barbara: Why are you here if you don't understand?

Ana: _____

_____

_____

The responses they wrote ranged from angry demands to conciliatory appeals for foregiveness. Here are some of them:

"I'm here because I need a job. I trying to learn English."
"You are discriminating me."
"Don't discriminate my language and culture."
"I'm here because I have problems in my country. I'm sorry I no speak English."

They wrote these sentences on large newsprint and we reviewed them, alternating between correcting grammar and discussing content. When I asked them about the emotions they were each trying to express, it became clear that people had differing understandings of the relationship between the two characters. What I thought had been clear (that Barbara was a store employee and Ana the customer) was not. One person thought that they were roommates.

Obviously, many students did not make the connection between this dialogue and the similar story we had heard a few days earlier. I realized we had to back up a bit and build a better context for this scene. So I asked the group about the characters: who they were; where they were from; whether they were young or old; comfortable or poor; and who they were as family members. As they created the characters, the dialogue began to come to life. When they read it again, they read with animation and interest.

Now that we had a greater concensus about just who these characters were, I asked again about how Ana would feel at the end of the dialogue. People felt that their initial responses were still appropriate and that it made sense that Ana would experience several conflicting emotions. They agreed that she felt anger, fear, and embarrassment. I reflected these emotions in the composite response I created for Ana out of their writings. The completed dialogue became a cloze exercise for the next day.

Ana: Marcos, tienes que limpiar tu cuarto.

Barbara: Excuse me. We _____ speak English here.

Ana: I'm sorry. I _____ speak English.

Barbara: This is America. You _____ speak English if you want _____ live here.

Ana: ¿Que cosa? I don't _____ _____.

Barbara: Why _____ you here if you don't understand?

Ana: I'm here because I want to live and work in America. I am trying to learn English. It is not easy to live here. I need your help. Please don't discriminate against me. English is important, but my language and culture are important, too.

Ana

Ana is from Colombia. She have 25 years _____. She is married and she is _____ mother. She _____ one son. She have a job cleaning in a store, but she is poor.

She only speak Spanish. She says, "The life in America is hard for me because _____ don't speak English. She is afraid and she is angry because in the store _____ discriminate _____ her language.

Please complete the sentences about Ana.

1. She _____ speak English.

2. She _____ in a store.

3. She's _____ American.

4. She _____ a child.

5. Her life _____ hard.

True or False?

1. _____ Ana and Barbara are friends.

2. _____ Ana has a lot of money.

3. _____ Ana wants to understand English.

4. _____ Barbara likes Latinos.

5. _____ Ana feels angry.

6. _____ Barbara feels angry.

7. _____ Barbara should learn Spanish.

8. _____ Ana should learn English.

Ana feels

Barbara feels

I realized, at this point, that these characters could play an on-going role in our class—that, like puppets, we could use them to discuss the daily drama of our lives. But we first needed to flesh them out and get to know them better. So the next class, the students discussed the characters and their relationship again as they worked on a true or false exercise and then broke into two groups to write LEAS about each of the characters. These stories were typed and returned for language correction and grammar practice, which we worked on together as a class.

Unfortunately, our school schedule prevented us from taking Barbara and Ana through further trials and tribulations. Our class ended too soon for us to take advantage of the life they had taken on. I hope that such characters join our classes in the future. If I were to do this again, I would take the time to more carefully set the "scenes" (characters, place, time, etc.) before jumping into situations and plots without adequate context. Role plays would work well to develop characters and improvise scenes. As long as student interest fuels it, the possibilities are endless.

A.N.

Real People's Stories

Autobiographies in the ESL classroom

In my search for relevant and inspiring materials for use in the ESL class, I've reflected a lot on my experience using autobiographical literature as text. Contributing to my reflections was a workshop I attended on how to use autobiography as part of an ESL curriculum. The workshop was given by a teacher whose ESL class had read *The Diary of Anne Frank*. I came away inspired but skeptical, thinking, "That's great, but she's working with formally educated students in an intensive summer program. I'm working with students from a wide range of class, cultural and educational backgrounds who come to class after 14-hour workdays." Talking with other adult education teachers helped me to consider the possibilities and problems of incorporating autobiographical literature into my situation.

My reasons for wanting to use autobiography in the class are plentiful. One is purely selfish. It can be a beautiful, inspiring form of literature and I need to walk into class with inspiration. Another reason is that it is a new form of writing for students often saturated with dialogues, short stories, newspaper articles, letters and traditional texts. I am especially interested in using autobiography as a text because it is so personal and so direct and because it validates human experiences. In addition, autobiographies address themes that are relevant to everyone, such as family, work, school, racism, and sexism. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is the joy that students express when discovering that they are reading a real book, a real person's story, and that they themselves have a story other people might want to read.

My hesitations about using autobiographical literature in class are as multifold as my reasons for wanting to use it. I've been concerned by complex language and imagery, historical references, and by the at times intense and painful nature of the personal stories being told. Thus I have edited the stories as I simplified them for classroom use. While these adaptations do have their place, they also defy my original intent to provide "real" reading materials. Where simplicity is gained, the beauty of the author's voice is lost, slang expressions are replaced and, perhaps most importantly, my goal of not underestimating adult students' capacities is lost as well.

This fall, I chose to risk using a long excerpt from *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou. I was working with an intermediate ESL class reading about and discussing racism in the U.S. We had read an interview with a Honduran woman in the U.S., a newspaper article about racial conflicts between Asian and white youths, and a story about the Montgomery bus boycott. The selection by Maya Angelou appealed to me because it continued a discussion we had begun in class about more subtle forms of racism. It also held a strong appeal because in this selection Angelou describes her job as a domestic and her relationship with her employer. This is a job many of the students in the class also held.

To begin the lesson, I wrote the title of the book and the author's name on the board. I told the students that Angelou is a black woman and that were going to read a part of her life story. We discussed possible meanings of the title. Then we looked at a sheet with some expressions, two-word verbs and vocabulary from the excerpt. I hoped to prepare students for the difficult reading by setting the context for the story and giving them some specific tools for interpreting the text.

We finally looked at the story. It was a struggle. Students were intimidated by the length of the excerpt and I was worried that I was asking too much of them. Without enough time to get a clear understanding of the story, the class ended that night on a frustrating note.

From I know Why The Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou

During my tenth year, a white woman's kitchen became my finishing school.

Mrs. Viola Cullinan was a plump woman who lived in a three bedroom house somewhere behind the post office. She was singularly unattractive until she smiled, and then the lines around her eyes and mouth which made her look perpetually dirty disappeared, and her face looked like the mask of an impish elf. She usually rested her smile until late afternoon when her women friends dropped in and Miss Glory, the cook, served them cold drinks on the closed-in porch.

one evening Miss Glory told me to serve the ladies on the porch. After I set the tray down and turned toward the kitchen, one of the women asked, "What's your name, girl?" It was the speckled-faced one. Mrs. Cullinan said, "She doesn't talk much. Her name's Margaret."

"Is she dumb?"

"No. As I understand it, she can talk when she wants to but she's usually quiet as a little mouse. Aren't you, Margaret?"

I smiled at her. Poor thing. . . . . couldn't even pronounce my name correctly.

"She's a sweet little thing, though."

"Well, that may be, but the name's too long. I'd never bother myself. I'd call her Mary if I was you."

I fumed into the kitchen. That horrible woman would never have the chance to call me Mary because if I was starving I'd never work for her. I decided I wouldn't pee on her if her heart was on fire.

The very next day, she called me by the wrong name.

Heat that soup from last night and put it in the china tureen and, Mary, I want you to carry it carefully."

Every person I knew had a hellish horror of being "called out of his name." It was a dangerous practice to call a Negro anything that could be loosely construed as insulting because of the centuries of their having been called niggers, jigs, dinges, blackbirds, crows, boots and spooks.

The next day we returned to the story. I had considered dropping the lesson altogether, thinking that perhaps it was just too hard. However, I thought that sweeping it under the rug might be more frustrating in the long run. There must be other ways we could approach this piece of writing.

As in all ESL classes, there were people in the second class who had missed the first, so I began by asking students who had attended the first class to recount what they remembered of the story to those who had been absent. Though at first they protested that they didn't understand enough of the text, this turned into a wonderful activity.

Students recounted the story in detail, and talked not only about the characters and events but about how the characters felt. I wrote some of the information on the board. People asked clarifying questions and pieced the story together. This gave an opportunity both for students who had read the story to clarify what they understood and for "latecomers" to participate without feeling that they were slowing others down.

To work into the story a little more, I wrote some sentences on notecards (one word per card) and gave these sentences to students to unscramble. Some of the sentences included difficult idioms and others were sentences key to the meaning of the story.

Once again we returned to the actual piece of writing. I asked students to think about what happens next. How does Margaret feel? What will she do?

It was clear in the students' minds that Margaret quit, and they began to talk about their own experiences in jobs where they were unhappy, and times they were fired or quit. One Brazilian student said he worked for a painting company where the boss called all the employees José number l, 2, 3, etc. One day the boss yelled for him to come over (he was José #5) and he replied, "What is it, _____" calling the boss by an incorrect name. The boss yelled at him: "That's not my name!" and he said "José #5 is not my name, either." He was fired and was not paid for his final two weeks for about five months.

Other students sympathized with this situation and spoke of both subtle and blatant discrimination in settings as diverse as nursing homes, garment factories, and restaurants. The issue of whether or not there's any value in filing discrimination complaints was hotly debated.

Later in the year we all participated in a workshop with the Boston Human Rights Commission, as well as a workshop with IRATE, an organization of unions working to educate immigrants about workplace rights. This, clearly, did not resolve the debates, or make the problems disappear. It did, however, give us all more information about legal and civil rights and some of the channels available to fight for them.

I had originally copied two excerpts from this autobiography. In the second excerpt, Margaret is fired. I had intended to read this as a class but decided instead to give it to students and not push it on the class as a whole. Many students really identified with Angelou's experience and all loved her language; really laughed aloud at it.

In reflecting on these classes, I feel that I learned a great deal. I learned from students' work experiences and dialogues that emerged about them. I learned about the importance of not only pre-reading activities, but of giving students time to read, absorb, think about, and really delve into the literary excerpt. I think I was too ready in this case to believe this lesson was too hard. I need to come into the class allowing myself and students a little more time and space. Overall, I learned to examine a little more closely how I select materials for the class and open up to the challenging, not always easy real voices of real people.

A.C.

Mothers and Their Children

Writing About Our Mothers

It's often difficult to imagine open-ended writing projects for beginning ESL students, since they are shy about exposing their mistakes and frustrated by the confinement of expressing their thoughts and ideas with limited language. These writings about mothers, however, were the longest and most freely-written pieces I have seen by these low level students.

The idea for these writings was mine, born out of several class discussions about the Thanksgiving holidays, family gatherings, and aging parents. The process was strung out across three weeks, interspersed with other pressing activities such as protests against budget cuts, class evaluations, etc. It began when I brought in a reading called "My Mother"; a woman's reflections on the life of her mother. We first looked at a picture of the mother and predicted some things about her life, but the story was difficult for this group and it became clear that there had not been enough pre-reading activities. We had just enough time in this first class to finish reading through the story once.

The next day, I was absent but left for the substitute some comprehension and language activities to begin a review of the story. She facilitated an in-depth discussion of the story and then shared a simple story about her own mother. The students used her story as a model for beginning their own.

As often happens when writings are based on models, however, their writings lacked imagination and personal inspiration. In some cases, they resembled factsheets more than stories. So I began the next class by showing photographs of my mother at different points in her life, answering questions about her, and then posting her dramatic life story for us all to read together. My goal was to draw them into the story, help them recall their own memories, and share the same personal details that I was asking from them. We read the story fairly quickly, as the "high-interest" content (i.e. anything about the teacher) held their attention and prompted unprecedented cooperation in making sure that everyone understood.The flip side of using their curiosity about me is that they also seemed timid about asking questions about my story. This made it difficult to model a revision process which starts with reader questions. However, they had identified with many of the issues that came up in my story, and this stimulated them to think about new pieces to add to their own. They worked on their stories for the rest of the period, stating clearly to me, at the end, that they were not finished and expected time to finish another day.

I xeroxed what they had writtin thus far so that I could return their originals but have a copy on which to write my own reader questions for them. The next day, I asked a woman who is typically way behind everyone else in her reading and writing to read her story to the group. I asked her because her story was interesting and well-written, and I wanted to capitalize on this opportunity for the group to appreciate her work.

My Mother

My mother died in 1973. Before, she lived in Puerto Rico. She worked in her home. She had nine children, but one died. She was happy. She was a good mother. My mother was married to my father for forty-five years or more.

My father died in 1980. He worked on a farm. He cut sugar cane. This work was very hard.

The mention of her father's work as a cane cutter prompted a host of anecdotes about farm work, cane plantations, safety hazards of farm machinery, and milking cows. All of these were in Spanish, which was fine with me. I've seen that Spanish and English have separate functions in the classroom and, in this situation, it was more gratifying for people to be able to share their stories quickly and easily in their native tongue. We all knew that English activities would follow. When we got back to writing, many people transcribed their tales into English and wove them into their stories.

As I thought about the class later, I wondered about our evolution from the topic of "mothers" to "farms" and worried about our shifting focus. Should I let the writings go where they may, "organically," or should I steer the group's attention back to mothers? I chose the latter because, in the past, I've regretted flitting from theme to theme too quickly, without giving people enough opportunity to explore one topic thoroughly.

To do this, I began the next class with a dictation exercise, dictating sentences from their writings. I started with sentences about farms and moved on to sentences about our mothers. Soon people were chatting about their mothers and we were back on our original theme. I asked them to choose at least one of the following sentences to complete:

One thing I will always remember about my mother is . . .
My mother liked to . . .
My mother taught me . . .

We shared our sentences and, for homework, I asked them to integrate the new information into their stories.

In my class, very few people do homework. And this day was no exception. But that was fine. Just about everyone was in the same boat of having a story composed of may pieces, each written on a different day and inspired by its own discussion or activity. Today I wanted them to help each other edit their pieces together. They paired up and began reading their writings to each other. My directions were for the partner to ask clarifying questions and help synthesize the pieces. But this group had never done peer editing in this way before—we had never discussed process writing and people didn't know what kinds of questions to ask. I made a mental note of this planning error and took on the role of questioner myself. I circled around, asking authors about their stories and then leaving the pairs to work on integrating the answers together. More advanced students scribed and often translated for those having trouble writing their thoughts in English and students who were finished with the composing process sat with me to figure out some corrections. Somehow, amid the chaos, people helped each other put their stories in shape and we ended up with a wonderful reader for Christmas.

My Mother

My mother is fifty-three years old. Her name is Fabiola, and Fabiola is the queen of my home. She grew up in Medellin, Colombia. My mother had five children. She has two daughters and three sons - Rubiela, Rosmira, Jorge, Ruben, and Fabio. She was also very beautiful. Her husband died on a farm in 1963 from a snake bite. She was sad for a long time.

She met a very rich family. She went to work with this family for a long time. She worked in this home as a kitchen helper and babysitter.

My mother taught me respect for my father and brothers. My mother taught me that in the morning to play.

My mother now has a small farm inheritance from my father. On this farm she has cows, pigs, chickens, dogs and cats. She grows potatoes, tomatoes, onions, oranges, lemons, and bananas. My mother sold fruits, milk and cheese in the town. With the money she buys dresses and food for her children.

My mother is good with the poor people. At Christmas she gives presents for the poor people.

Now my mother is blind from an illness inherited from my grandfather.

Fabio

My Father

My Father is 67 years old
His name is Miguel.
He Live in Guatemala
He married wit my mother when
He was 28 yer old
My father went to work wit horses
on a coffee Farm For alot of
months. He returne in the house
sin nothing for money Sometimes
the manager didn't pay him. He went
to the Party.
He think work an another Farm.
Growing onions, corn, potatoes
He make many money
Now he is owner the Farm
horses, cows, He went apartament
a Peoples. Help. a my mother
in the store. Live wit Mother
He travel wit my mother and my
sisters Comment Yer to Boston.

Francisca.

However, the process left me with these concerns. First, this topic may be painful or feel intrusive to some people. Next time I would include some "safer" options for writing. Second, I am left wondering about the value of meshing several pieces of writing as opposed to having people elaborate on a single idea. It happened to work on this occasion, but I believe that a piece of writing should be developed intact, not patched together artificially. The result is usually quantity over quality. And, lastly, these issues and many decisions I made along the way could have been shared with the group. Letting go of directorship would have made the most significant difference in these classes.

A.N.

Everything Happened for the Best

Parents talk about problems at school

This year all the people in my class are mothers. Their children's ages range from infant to adult. Almost everyone has at least one kid in either school or daycare. Although all of them are concerned about their children's education and well being, it is not immediately apparent what specific childcare issues they share. That is to say, while the mother of a two year old may be struggling with how to discipline her toddler, the mother of a seventeen year old may be worrying about teenage pregnancy. "Where is the ground of common concern?" I asked myself.

In many cultures parents depend on the schools to assist or even to guide them in the process of child rearing. Parents often expect their children's teachers to take responsibility for their children's educational as well as moral development. In the United States, however, parents frequently take a more active role in their children's education. Asking questions about and advocating for their education can make a significant difference in how both the teacher works and the student learns. But asking questions and advocating for change can be difficult for our students who come from cultures where schools have a great deal of authority and who might feel intimidated by American schools and teachers. I decided, therefore, that introducing the topic of their rights as parents would be of interest to everyone. This was the area I chose to focus on with my class.

The first part of this unit consisted of the students filling in a big chart with information about their kids:

NAME	# of KIDS	KIDS' NAMES	KIDS AGES	KIDS SCHOOLS or DAYCARE	KIDS TEACHER
Kiros	1	Axumawit	2 years	kids are people	Nancy
Hilda	2	Kissie Albert	11 17	Fitzgerald not in school	Ms. Thompson
Rosalia	2	Samuel Anna	3 years 3 months	babysitter at home	my mother
Lorda	2	Liza Lily	3 years 5 years	Mattapan School	?

The students then wrote sentences about each other's children using information from the chart:

Kiros has 1 kid. Her name is Axumawit.
Hilda has 1 daughter. She goes to Fitzgerald school.

Next, I asked them if they had ever visited their kids' schools. One woman has had a lot of experience with her children's schools. She was quite a resource for all of us throughout this unit. She explained the differences in the conferences and meetings they were asked to attend. I wrote some of the key words on the board as they talked. I then presented some vocabulary and idioms in preparation for the story we were going to read. The story comes from a journal of student writing published by a literacy program in Toronto, Canada. It is by a mother who was dissatisfied with her son's teacher, and who was effective in getting him transferred to a new and more appropriate class.

We read the story several times and worked on vocabulary. After everyone fully understood the

Everything Happened for the Best

by Lee Hargrove

My son, Harry, was a student at Spruce Court School. He was eight years old and still in the first grade.

I asked Harry if the teacher had been helping him. He said no. She gave him the paper and pencil and book and told him to go sit down. He couldn't do it by himself.

I went to the school and talked to her and asked her why my son was behind. She told me there were too many kids and she could not give him the attention. A lot of kids in her class didn't pass.

I went to Mr. Donahue, the principal, and told him I wanted to get to the bottom of this, why she kept my son back like that. He said he would set up a meeting and let me know.

At the meeting, I said, "I don't want that woman to be my son's teacher." He said, "Mrs. Hargrove, I can help you." I said, "I want my son in another classroom or another school."

He made a lot of phone calls. He was very nice to me. I thought he was going to be mad at me, but he said, "I understand. I am a father, I'm with you. I'm not mad. Go for it, and good luck."

He took me to see another school. He said the classes were small there, just six or seven kids in each class.

Now Harry goes to this school. Now he can read, and he can spell. He's a little slow in his writing, but not bad. He could improve more.

ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.

1. How old is Harry? _____

2. What grade is he in? _____

3.Was the teacher helping Harry? _____

4. What the teacher tell Harry to do? _____

5.Why didn"t the teacher help Harry? _____

_____

6.Who did Harry's mom talk to? _____

7.What did Harry's mom tell the principal? _____

_____

8.Why did Harry's mom think the prncipal would be mad at her? _____

_____

9.Did the principal help her? _____

10. What is different in Harry's new school? _____

11. How is Harry doing in school now? _____

12. How old are your children? _____

13.Where do they go to school or daycare? _____

14. What are their teachers' names? _____

15. Do you ever visit your kids' school or daycare? _____

16. DId your kids ever have a problem at school or daycare? What happened?_____

_____

17. Did you ever disagree with your kids' teacher or babysitter? What did you do?

_____

18. What makes a good teacher or babysitter?_____

_____

_____

story, I placed a set of cards, some blue, some white, in the middle of the table. The blue cards had questions about the story; the white cards had questions about them. Each person took a card and asked the others a question. This led to many days of interesting and far-reaching discussion. I participated in the discussion whenever some clarification was needed, but most of the time I was taking notes about what they were saying. During those same days we also worked on the past tense for part of each class. After they had gone through all of the cards, I gave them a worksheet that included the initial vocabulary words, past tense review and all the questions from the cards for them to answer in writing.

The discussion that had been generated by the card-questions lasted for two weeks. People spoke very frankly about their concerns and experiences with their children. They talked about behavior and discipline; about learning problems and discrimination. In other words, they talked about things that really affect their lives. Nonetheless, they seemed sort of restless toward the end of the second week. It seemed to be a case of not doing enough "school" work. I decided that it would be helpful for them to get some literacy reinforcement, so I wrote up a kind of report from the discussion. I used my notes to pick out points to highlight and to raise some questions for them to consider further. The class notes (as I called them) were a much lengthier reading selection than anything they had previously received. Although they were at first a bit intimidated by the length of the reading, because all the material was based on their words, the print was accessible. It took a couple of days to read through the whole thing. This reading also generated more discussion and, in fact, our next topic—lead paint poisoning.

Class notes are a good way for students to take stock of what they are learning both in the traditional school sense as well as in terms of sharing information with each other, participating in the shaping of curriculum and thinking more critically about the problems that they face. I think that the next time I do this kind of write up, I will include some writing exercises throughout the text to make it more interactive. Also, I would like to get to the point with my students where they participate in the production of the class notes. It could be very time consuming, but I think it would be good for all of us to take some time to reflect on the way we spend our time together.

M.R.

Homework Codes
Parents helping their kids

During the second year of our grant, the teachers in the project decided it would be interesting to see how a given code would play itself out in the three different sites. After much discussion the curriculum specialist, Andy, wrote out the following codes. She wrote two different codes with the idea we would chose the one most suitable for our group. Andy agreed to come to our classroom with her tape recorder and tape our lessons so that we could look at the transcriptions later for possible insights about why things went the way they did.

Father: Do you have homework today?

Linda: Yes, but I need help. The teacher told us to ask our parents for help.

Father: Hmmm, let's see.

Linda: What does that say, daddy?

Father: Hmmm. The . . . . . little . . . . . girl?

Linda: What's the matter, dad?

Father: Don't rush me!

I went to Linda's school this morning for a parent-teacher conference. The teacher, Mr. Finney, told me he's glad I help Linda with her reading homework. He said that all parents should help their children practice reading.

But it's not true that I help Linda at home. I don't know how to read English. Now I'm afraid to tell Mr. Finney the truth. Maybe he'll think I'm a bad parent. I wonder why Linda told him a lie.

Dialogues about School

In order to prepare my students for the codes, I decided to show them the following dialogue that I found in the *Parents' Notebook*, a monthly newsletter published for parents with children in the Boston public schools. The dialogue comes from the article, "Your Child's School: What To Look For, What To Ask".

How was school today?
O.K.
What did you do?
Nothing.

written in 2 different color markers on a large piece of paper

I wrote the following questions to accompany the dialogue:

1. Who's talking to who?
2. Why is the parent asking these questions?
3. Why is the child responding like this?
4. Is this the kind of dialog you have in your house?

The fourth question generated a lot of discussion. Most of my students, all mothers, felt this wasn't the kind of dialogue that happened in their homes. So then I asked them to write on big pieces of paper an example of the kind of dialogue that did occur. I asked them to write the dialogue in the language or languages used. In other words, if they spoke in Spanish, I wanted them to write in Spanish. Some of them said they spoke in Spanish but their children answered them in English. I repeated my instructions: "Write whatever is true for your situation." What follows are some examples of their dialogues.

Blanca: Que hicieron en la escuela hoy.
Se portaron bien.

Carlos - Betsy: Si, mami.

Blanca: Tienen homework.

Carlos: Yo tengo cuatro.

Betsy: A mi se me oluido en la escuela

Blanca: La maestra te va a regañar
Que comieron hoy en la escuela?
Betsy: Pizza, leche, manzana, jelly.
Blanca: Estaba buena
Carlos + Betsy: Si

After they were all finished, we put the dialogues up on the board and read them aloud. Because I am not bilingual and not that proficient in Spanish, I asked the class for clarification or translation help when I needed it. After all the dialogues were read, I asked two questions: Which ones are similar? Which ones are different?

Most of the issues that came out of our discussion centered on which language *should* be used at home versus which language or languages *are* used. They also talked about how their children viewed them now that they were going to school to learn English. They talked about how they felt supported or unsupported by family members. One woman even brought up the fact that her daughter's kindergarten class was going to be switched to the afternoon as an example of another kind of non-support; this time, ironically being mandated by the school system. For homework, I asked the students to pay close attention to when they used which language (what were the circumstances).

The next day, when I asked them what they had observed, they talked about how they (the parents) only used English occasionally at home—a word here and there. However, they wanted to know more English because they wanted to know what their kids were saying to each other. Knowing more English was one way to keep an eye on what your kids were up to, they said. They said they talked in English if their children had English-speaking children over. They did this to be polite or because they felt embarrassed speaking Spanish.

Homework Codes:

It was in this context that I presented the two codes Andy developed. I chose to use both in a kind of three-step process. First, I put the dialogue Maria had written about asking her daughter about homework back on the board.

Maria: How was school today? Do you have homework?
Marviette: I dont have anything to do mam.
maria: You better told me before you go outsicle. what did you do?
Marviette: Well mam, the class it was o.k. and then we went swimming.

I asked the following questions to the class. Maria answered most of them. Here is an excerpt from the transcript:

T: What does the child say to the mother about homework? Does she have homework?
M: Yes, but she lied to me so she could go outside.
T: When you read this do we know the child is lying?
M: Sometimes she does her homework on the bus or before she leaves school.
T: (trying to involve other members of the class): Do you help your children with their homework: Do you make them do it?
S: Sometimes my son help my daughter when he don't want to do it, he ask me I can't help my son. It's too hard for me.
S: My daughter bring homework and I have to sign it because her teacher want to know if I help.
T: The teacher wants the parent to help, so you have to sign. Do you think this is a good idea?
S: I think it's good. My daughter have potential. She like when I help. We have to check the homework. I fine, I sign.

This was step one, connecting the previous day's work to the present. Once I felt they were warmed up I put the first code on the board scrambled up and asked them to order it. After they had finished ordering the dialogue I asked them to connect it back to what we had just been talking about. What they wanted to talk most about, though, was that from their Latina perspective it was highly unlikely that a father would take on this task of doing homework or reading to children. They also didn't identify with his inability to read because they felt they probably wouldn't even have tried to read it if it was that difficult.

It seemed that on one level the code was not very successful in that students were not identifying with the issue. However, on another level I felt this very disagreement or difference in perception of what was important to be a sign of strength; they would not allow someone else's issue to become their own. A new twist in the dialogic process.

For step three, I simply asked students to read the paragraph and then talk about how all three pieces fit together, if at all. What follows comes from another part of the transcript. I think it illustrates how one literacy activity can lead to the next.

T: What do you think the teacher thinks about the parents? Do you think the teacher knows or cares if the parents speak English or another language?
S: No.
S: I think when the homework is complicated I write a note to the teacher to say I can't help.
T: Do you say why it's complicated?
S: It's hard.
T: Does the teacher write you a note back?
S: No, I wrote to her in the night and then I talked to her in the afternoon when I pick him up. The teacher say, "No problem."
T: The rest of you, do you ever let the teacher know that the homework is difficult for you becauseit's not your language?
S: I send a letter in Spanish. My daughter teacher is bilingual. Sometimes I go in and talk to her.
T: Do you go at special times or when you feel like it?
S: I go whenever my son have problems. If she not interested, I go to the principal. I go the open house.
T: Is it scary to go?
S: I'm not scared. I have open house today for report cards . . .
T: Do you want to review the English on the report cards?
S: Yes, we need the report cards to show welfare, too. If kids don't go to school, they are dropped from welfare.

The class discussed the report cards that their children were getting. Many expressed they couldn't read the teacher's handwritten comments or didn't understand them.

I think the transcript not only shows how one activity leads to the next, in this case how to read and interpret report cards, but also provides a kind of proof that yes, immigrant families *do* value education and *are* interacting with school administrators and teachers. And as the last comment illustrates, there is another level of concern here, the socio-political reality of how government dictates values and manages its poor.

After working on report cards for a few days, I gave the students a copy of the bilingual guide on homework tips for parents developed by a former Title VII grant. I asked them to read through the tips and respond to these three questions.

1. Which recommendations are you doing now? Why?
2. Which recommendations would you like to try? Why?
3. Which recommendations do you think are unworkable for you? Why?

The answers I received proved to me once again that parents are doing a lot with and for their children and also have clear ideas of what is not possible for them because of language problems or because of time restraints—they are usually working full- or part-time. Their answers also showed me they were not going to let a list of "shoulds" dictate how they were going to educate their children. They were going to take what they could from the list but leave what was undoable and not feel guilty about it.

L.M.

HELPING WITH HOMEWORK

AYUDANDO CON LAS TAREAS

10 Homework Tips for Parents

10 Recomendaciones para los padres

Homework is a very important part of your child's education. Homework lets your child practice what he/she is learning in school. Homework also helps your child take responsibility for his/her own learning. Even if you didn't go to school in this country, or if your English isn't perfect, you as parents can help your child do homework. By helping, you'll find out what your child is studying in school.

Here are some suggestions for how you can help your child with his/her homework.

Preparar las asignaciones es una parte muy importante en la educación de su niño/a, ya que le permite practicar lo que ha aprendido en la escuela. Las asignaciones también le ayudan a su niño/a a responsabilizarse por su propio aprendizaje. Aún cuando usted no haya estudiado en este país, ó si su inglés no es perfecto, usted como padre puede ayudar a su niño/a a preparar sus asignaciones. A través de esta ayuda, usted se enterará de lo que su niño/a está estudiando en la escuela.

Aquí están algunas sugerencias sobre cómo ayudar a su niño/a preparar las asignaciones:

Talk to your child everyday about what he/she is doing in school and what he/she has for homework. This lets the child know that his/her learning in school is important to you.

Pregúntele a su niño/a todos los días qué ha hecho en la escuela y qué asignaciones tiene. Así su niño/a sabrá que a usted le interesa lo que él/ella aprenda.

Provide a quiet, well-lit place where your child can do his/her homework. This place could be the kitchen table or a special corner in any room, away from distractions such as the television and other noises.

Prepare un sitio bien alumbrado y callado donde su niño/a pueda hacer sus tareas. Este puede ser la mesa de la cocina, ó una esquina en la sala; lo importante es que esté alejado de distracciones tales como la televisión y otros ruidos.

Get your child in the habit of doing his/her homework everyday, preferably at the same place and time everyday.

Desarróllele a su niño/a el hábito de preparar las tareas todos los días, preferiblemente en el mismo sitio y a la misma hora siempre.

Check your child's homework when it is finished. Find out if it is:
- neat,
- complete,
- correctly done. *

* Even if you don't read English very well, you can see if the work is neat. If the work is not complete or the child has a question, suggest that he/she call a friend.

Revise la tarea una vez que su niño/a la haya completado. Fíjese que esté:
- limpia, sin borrones,
- terminada,
- correcta. *

* Aún si usted no lee en inglés, usted puede asegurarse de que el trabajo esté limpio. Si la tarea no se ha podido completar, ó su niño/a tiene preguntas todavía, sugiérale que llame a una compañera de clase.

If your child has a long-term assignment such as a book report or has to study for a test, you can:

(a) Mark the assignment due date or test date on the calendar.
(b) Help your child make a schedule with a plan for how to complete this assignment or prepare for the test, so that all the work is not left for the last minute.
(c) Make sure that your child follows the plan.

Si su niño/a tiene una asignación a largo plazo, tal como un informe de un libro, ó tiene que estudiar para un examén, usted le puede ayudar haciendo lo siguiente:

(a) Marcando la fecha del examén ó cuando se vence la asignación en el calendario de la cocina.
(b) Ayudando a su niño/a a hacer un horario con un plan para completar la tarea ó prepararse para el exámen. Así todo el trabajo no se le queda para la última hora.
(c) Asegurándose de que el niño/a se adhiera al plan.

Try to have available pencils, pens, erasers and paper for your child's homework. Try to have a dictionary and other reference books such as a thesaurus and world atlas.

Trate de tener lápices, plumas y borradores disponibles para cuando su niño/a prepare las tareas. También es útil tener un diccionario y otros libros de referencia tales como un Thesaurus y un Atlas.

Ask your child to read to you an interesting part of his/her homework.

Pídale a su niño/a que le lea alguna parte interesante de su asignación.

Try to read aloud with your children as often as possible. You can read together story books, articles from newspapers, magazines, or even advertisements and bills that you get in your mail. If the child reads English better than the parent, this can be a good reason to ask the child to read to the parent.

Trate de leer en voz alta con los niños frecuentemente. Pueden leer juntos libros de cuentos, artículos de periódico, revistas y hasta anuncios y cuentas que llegan por correo. Si su niño/a lee en inglés mejor que usted, pídale al niño/a que le lea.

Praise your child frequently for good work and a job well done. Be supportive.

Elogie a su niño/a frecuentemente por hacer una buena labor. Dêle apoyo en sus tareas.

The Family Class

Teaching parents and children together

Often, as a Family Literacy Project teacher I have questioned the name of the project and its reflection in my class and the community agency where I work. What is family literacy? What is participatory family literacy? What is participatory family literacy in a community agency?

With these questions in mind I have been teaching cycle after cycle. But last March, while I was teaching the spring cycle and registration was taking place, I noticed more than before the people registering for the next cycle. They were waiting for their interviews with the counselor outside my classroom door. I socialized casually with the people coming for registration. I noticed those that were alone, those that were with friends and, above all, those that were with children. Noticing the people naturally led me to take a second look at our facilities. I realized that the people coming with children and, in many cases with infants, did not have adequate space in our adult program. Moreover, those with small children and no childcare (of which there were many) were unable to participate in any of the classes in the adult program.

This sudden realization led me to view my role as a family literacy teacher in a community agency pragmatically. I started to contemplate the idea of a class where men or women could participate with their children. The children would be in the classroom under the care of all the adult participants. The community agency where I work does not provide any childcare for those in the adult program. The lack of funding specific for childcare was another reason why having the children in the classroom was the pragmatic solution. This pragmatic solution, however, would create a totally unknown and challenging teaching situation for me, teaching parents and children together.

I approached the potential students of this family literacy class and listened to what they had to say. Their response to my inquiry about how they would feel in a class where they could bring their children was very warm and positive. With this encouraging answer I decided to move forward and convince my co-workers and the administration of the agency that it was feasible and necessary to start a new kind of family literacy class. The administration was not very receptive to the idea. My co-workers accepted the idea as long as I was the one responsible for this class. Finally, the administration consented to this new class in the adult program. With their permission in hand I arranged my classroom so that the children could have their own space. I made phone calls to get donations for a carpet, books and some toys. Some of my co-workers assisted me in this search, and I was able to have my room arranged as I needed it before the cycle started.

Classes began. But to my dismay I came to a classroom where some people with no daycare needs had been placed without their knowledge or consent. They didn't understand why they were in this "special" class. My class was going to meet twice a week, unlike the other classes that met four times a week. There was no other teacher assigned to share the class. The students were angry and I had to call the director of the adult program. The director tried to solve the situation by offering students the opportunity to move to another group. But they wanted to remain as a group with those that had children and they wanted four days of instruction like everybody else in the program. He said it was not possible. Two days was all the adult program could offer. At this point in the chain of events I decided that I could make some changes in my teaching load given that the summer was about to start. This meant that I could teach the family literacy class for the remaining two days.

The motivation in this class was very high. My routine began by first engaging the children who ranged from five months to four years old, but at times included ten or twelve-year-old kids. Every

morning I spent the first fifteen to twenty minutes doing some activity with the children centered around what the adults were going to discuss in class. The students in the class were all women and were mostly working at home. Our lessons ranged from discussing housework and sex roles to AIDS, and what being a woman meant to them. The children, in the meantime, would discuss what "mami" was doing by making a clock with an old cardboard box and coloring the cards where the numbers went. They would color rectangles or circles together and glue the cards to the cardboard. Sometimes our discussions would generate drawings on big pieces of paper spread out on the walls all over one end of our room. An adult, be it the parent or somebody else, would interview the child about his/her drawing.

My role was to design teaching materials based on what was discussed in the class. I didn't have a way to share with them the development I saw, but I needed one. There were days when Quica, one of the women in the class, would feel that she was not progressing as fast as the other women did. We all tried to support her in class but she kept saying that she could not do what others were doing in class. I thought of writing down what they felt they learned in class, and how that helped them outside th classroom. I made a chart called ACCOMPLISHMENTS. It was divided in two. One side was for what people learned in class and the other side was for how what happened in the class helped them in their daily lives. Quica became one of the main contributors to this chart that we filled in once or twice a week.

Going back to the Family Literacy Project name, my experience was that this bureacratic sounding name could be of some use if the community agency were flexible and open to keeping up with the changes in the needs of the population they are serving. The name "Family Literacy Class" was used mostly by those running the community agencies. But in this case, the students in the class as well as those out of the classroom started referring to it as the "Family Class."

R.G-S.

Redefining Learning and Teaching

A Good Story

A class discovers the benefits of process writing

One thing I have learned over and over in teaching is that methods and techniques are just tools and that it is the way they are used that determines participation in the classroom. Methods work best for me when their purpose is clear and when students feel that their own learning goals are served by them. When this isn't the case, and students don't understand *why* the teacher is moving the class ina certain direction, they aren't able to actively engage in the process and make the lesson their own.

This problem hascome up when I've tried to have students do process writing in class. Since I have wanted learners to see writing as more than just a single draft that gets corrected by the teacher and then copied over by the author, I have arranged various activities where students could share their writings, discuss content, revise, and later offer peer correction. This process would go well until students were asked to incorporate the feedback into a second draft. What had been fleshed out, orally, to a full, flowing story did not transfer to paper. Questions authors had been asked about their first drafts were answered in discrete sentences that got tacked on someplace without integrating the information into the fabric of the piece. Once writing was involved, it seems, students returned to concerns of correctness and abandoned many of the insights that had come out of their group discussions.

It was apparent that students were not engaging in the "process" as I had imagined it. Revision continued to be, for many, just extra work with little purpose. I decided to back up a step so we could explore the notion of "good writing." By making writing the topic of discussion, we could share our experiences and opinions, and then look at the ways the process writing approach could help us reach our own standards of quality. I hoped that students would gain control of the process so that they could *use* it instead of just following its steps.

I began by presenting an example of a story that we could all agree needed a lot of work. On newsprint, I wrote the story of a woman who loved her neighborhood but had to move. The writing contained many language errors. More importantly, though, there were many omissions of important information—information that was crucial to understanding the predicament of the author.

We read the story together and drew out some points of confusion. Then we wrote some questions that would need to be answered to clarify that confusion before the story could be considered "complete." The questions included: Who is telling (writing) this story? Why doesn't s/he like the neighborhood? If s/he likes the neighborhood, why is s/he moving?

I took their questions and returned with two new versions of the story. The first was just the original story corrected for language er-

My neighborhood very friendly. Everyone are like family. The summer we have the big barbecues. But I no like the neighbors live upstairs.

I have live in Dudley Street since ate years. Everybody know me. When I sick, Mrs. Flores shopping my food because we other help in this neighborhood. I moving next month to Dorchester.

My name is Maria. I live in Roxbury with my daughters. My neighborhood very friendly. Everyone are like family. The summer we have the big barbecues. But I no like the neighbors live upstairs. They put the music very noisy. The kids push my boy in the street. That kid crazy.

I have live in Dudley Street since ate years. Everybody know me. When I sick, Mrs. Flores shopping my food because we other help in this neighborhood.

I moving next month to Dorchester because I get Seccion 8 over there. My landlord gives me high rent and I no can pay. I am very sad to move away my friends and community.

My neighborhood is very friendly. Everyone is like family. In the summer, we have big barbecues. But I don't like the neighbors who live upstairs.

I have lived on Dudley Street for eight years. Everybody knows me. When I'm sick, Mrs. Flores goes shopping for my food because we help each other in this neighborhood. I'm moving next month to Dorchester.

rors. The second was a rewrite with new information added to improve it, but no language correction. We looked at them both and then discussed which one was a better story and why. Although the rewrite was full of "errors," students agreed that it was a more effective piece of writing. We knew this because it inspired several people to speak about their own experiences with good neighbors, bad neighbors, Section 8, and moving. We had come to the important realization that good writing moves the reader to respond.

Somehow, in the process of comparing these two stories, it clicked for everyone that good writing means more than correctness. And we saw that good writing comes about through discussion and questioning—precisely what we had been doing all along. Now that the group had seen how much a story could improve, they understood why they were revising, and the process became their own. They agreed that it is worthwhile to take the extra steps to clarify, elaborate, and bring life to their stories. And I saw immediate reward in sharing my teaching ideas and strategies so that students could better understand and evaluate their usefulness.

However, as I continued to think about their writing, I uncovered new layers of literacy use issues that I had not considered. For example, I thought about the fact that the students in this class were not accustomed to using literacy for storytelling. Storytelling, to them, was just that—the telling (speaking) of a story. Writing was not the way they shared their experiences with a larger community; the rich oral traditions of their Latino cultures served that function. They used print primarily as a link to institutions (schools, courts, etc.), and in these familiar contexts, they knew very well what "good writing" was.

How did their experience of print primarily as "information" affect their ability to write prose in class? Where di the focus on creative writing come from and did it advance the students' own literacy agendas? These new questions did not discourage me, but only reminded me that there is more I can explore with students that will enrich our understanding of literacy as it is used in different contexts and cultures. And these questions are where the "process" in "process writing" should begin.

A.N.

Correction

Every teacher deals with correction in a different way. Even those of us who share certain pedagogical beliefs about how and when correction is appropriate differ in the ways that we have applied our understanding of constructive correction. Nevertheless, we can share some of our basic beliefs about correction and how its form and purpose may vary.

Primarily, we convey to learners that we are concerned with communication, not correctness, per se. The purpose of correction is to clarify meaning and facilitate understanding. When correction is overused, it creates an emphasis on weakness, error and inability that undermines learner confidence and willingness to take risks. Teachers often give learners a double message when they ask them to speak or write freely and then note all the errors they have made along the way.

And what do teachers define as correct? Do we judge by standards of grammar, appropriate usage, the success of a communicated message? Correctness is not something that speakers of a language can always agree upon. Just the way meaning is constructed jointly by a speaker and a listener, or a writer and a reader, correctness is something that may change depending on who is communicating to whom and for what purpose. For this reason, we have encouraged learners to use self- and peer-correction whenever possible, pooling and refining their knowledge of what and why some language is more "correct" than other. This reminds learners that they have their own developing sense of correctness and that they must use it to communicate with a variety of people in the world, most of whom make an abundance of "errors" in their native languages.

The approach we have used is to first focus on the communicative strengths learners already have and then to broaden these abilities by providing models of real language in a variety of contexts. When we correct, we call attention to a limited number of the most intrusive problems so that the learner can concentrate on these and not be overwhelmed and silenced by attention to failure. In regard to spoken language, we are careful about the timing of correction, waiting until a speaker finishes or even a conversation ends so as not to interrupt the flow of language.

Of course, the role of correction varies depending on the goals of a particular lesson. A lesson designed to practice a verb tense may require consistent and definitive correction. A dialogue journal, on the other hand, may be left without explicit correction. Instead, the teacher might model correct forms back to the learner and provide opportunities for the learners to self-correct. In all cases, though, we try to make learners self-conscious of their own strategies for determining correctness.

Learning Pictures
Exploring student and teacher roles

In order for learners to become activists in their own learning processes, they need to fundamentally reconceptualize what education is. It is important to make this the content for dialogue and literacy work. One way I've tried to do this with my students is through pictures. I presented to them a series of pictures that depict different learning situations: parents teaching children, children teaching parents, teacher-fronted classrooms, people learning in groups, people learning from peers. The pictures prompted discussion on how people feel about learning in different situations. The pictures provided a good catalyst for writing.

In my endless quest for finding the perfect assessment tool, I thought that I might be able to use these pictures at the beginning of a cycle as a stimulus in order to get some "writing samples." In the past I had put together an eclectic collection of pictures around the theme of "family." I had asked students to select a picture and then write about it. I dutifully collected these writing samples, put them in "writing folders" and then at the end of the cycle I gave them back their picture and asked them to write again. I then carefully photocopied both sets of writings and put them side by side. I gave each student a copy of their pre- and post-writings and asked them if they saw any improvement.

What I learned from this experiment was that doing pre- and post-writing in this kind of isolated manner was as unrevealing as doing other kinds of pre- and post-testing. The interesting part was what they observed about themselves. Most of them used the writing to talk about their language development in general. Most believed they had made progress. They said they could see it.

Thus, when I decided to use the learning pictures as yet another attempt at assessment, I decided to do away with the whole concept of pre- and post-testing. Instead I decided I would focus on how to develop reading passages that would come from student writings. I would focus my attention on developing reading samples to be used with future students during an assessment of literacy in English. I reasoned that if I had writings that went with pictures that all dealt with a similar theme ("learning"), I could use these writings as texts for students who entered at all levels of literacy. The idea was that I would let the student choose which writing he/she wanted to read and then ask him/her questions about that writing. The pictures would serve as a visual pre-reading prompt just as it had earlier served as a pre-writing prompt. This was the intent. What follows is a summary of what happened in two intermediate level classrooms as I attempted to get students to write and then turn that writing into a reading text for other students.

I began by taping learning pictures up on the blackboard in a random way. I asked the students to look at the pictures and tell me what they saw. At first they talked about each picture and then about all of them as a group. Some recounted personal stories the images provoked while others stayed with describing exactly what they saw. I tried to be neutral by not judging their responses. This initial discussion was a very important piece because it allowed everyone to get in the mood to write and it especially allowed the non-writers (not literate in their native language or semi-literate in English) to share their thoughts orally. I remember vividly the emotions a Mexican migrant worker expressed about the picture of a Hispanic boy saying the Pledge of Allegiance, yet his writing was barely readable in either Spanish or English.

After about a ten-minute pre-writing warm-up, I told them I wanted them to write about the pictures, to write about anything at all that these pictures or our discussion had stimulated. I gave them ten minutes to write. During their writing time, I jotted down notes about our discussion and about which students spoke up. I also wrote about some of their writing behaviors, such as who

was concentrating, who was looking for a dictionary, etc. At the end of the ten minutes, the class asked for more time to write. I noted that my more advanced class wanted more time. By limiting the time at first and then changing it upon request, I wanted to make the writing atmosphere secure for all levels of writers.

I did this same activity with both my intermediate level classes. I then skimmed through all the writings from each class to see how they compared with each other. In both classes, I found that many students wrote about one particular picture—the picture of the strict-looking teacher at the board with a nervous-looking student.

I chose one writing from each class to be developed into a reading text. I chose writings that were very different in tone but that communicated their ideas clearly. Here is one:

My experience in school

When I went to school for the first few years I remember when the teacher sent me to the board. I felt nervous. and if I made a mistake the other students sometimes laughed at me many times I fought the students who laughed at me Many times I felt alone because I was shy but I didn't care about anything I wanted to learn and I did

A. da

"My Experience in School" came from a student in my level II class. The corrections came from the class members who decided that if this writing was going to be used as a reading, the grammar better be corrected. To illustrate the point that not all problems are grammatical, we looked at the sentence: "Many times I fought the school." We talked about what we thought it meant. The author, who had been anonymous until this point, told us she meant it was the students she had fought and not the school. She wanted to change it. This was a collaborative editing process but the final decision would remain with the author.

After editing and rereading the writing, I told them I wanted them to become teachers and think of some good questions that could go along with this reading. I put them into groups of three and asked them to come up with four questions. I told them that teachers often gave a range of questions from easy to difficult. After about ten minutes, I asked each group to put their questions on the board. From this group, we selected five questions they liked the best. The process brought up a lot more questions. For example, question #3, we decided, was hard to answer because we didn't know if she had learned or not because why would she be taking an ESL class today if she had learned? More discussion.

1. Why did she feel nervous?
2. How often did she feel alone?
3. Did she learn?
4. Why did she fight the other students?

The same process was followed with my other class, my family literacy class. Their question, "What do you want to ask Angela?" showed me they had understood how reading is an interactive process between the text and the reader.

When I was a teenager, I went to school I liked everything because my group shared very well.

It's funny I remember one teacher because she didn't like our group She said, "this group is intelligent but you don't like to take class with me You sit outside under a tree She was sad but ~~feel~~ felt love for all teachers They ~~were~~ were good with us.

<— When I ~~have~~ had to ~~go~~ leave, I miss ed my school and partners too.

Now in this country, there are some classmates Sometimes they visit me I feel good

Angela

Questions developed by the class:

1. Did she like her teacher?
2. Why did she miss her school?
3. Why does she feel good?
4. What do you want to ask Angela?

The classes exchanged their writings and questions. Students worked on answering the questions in small groups. These answers were then brought back to the class where the questions had originated. The students who had developed the questions now checked the answers from the other class. In addition to making the students feel powerful, the activities brought up a lot of feelings and opinions about the role of teachers. Many of them acted out what they thought teachers did or should do. There was also much discussion about what constituted a right answer. What happens, for example, if the idea is right but the grammar is wrong or vise versa.

The end result of all this was that I now had two interesting writings complete with questions ready to be used with future students as a reading text. But more than these products, I had initiated a process of thought and reflection about learning and teaching.

In the future, if I were to do this again, I would elaborate and spend more time on some of the activities. For example, I think the students and I should collectively choose the texts to turn into readings. I also would include a discussion following the initial writing that would investigate how people felt writing and why they wrote about what they did. Discussion could also focus on why or how it is important to understand our past educational histories.

L.M.

Native Language Use in Class

The ESL classroom is a meeting place for people from diverse linguistic, cultural and racial backgrounds. In some settings, ESL learners share one language, yet they are from different countries. In other settings learners come from many countries with different languages and cultures.

ESL learners who share one language other than English have ways of sharing with one another that they don't with a teacher who does not speak that language. The ESL teacher who does share the learners' common language has the opportunity to join that community by using both languages to communicate. The class can code switch, moving back and forth between the two languages as need be. This develops English fluency while securing the conversation in a commonly-understood language. Our experience has shown us that, contrary to the fear that learners will use the common language to avoid English practice, many experiment more freely with English because they know that, if they get stuck, they can still express themselves in their own tongue. Moreover, this form of bilingualism reflects the natural code-switching that occurs in many bilingual communities. Within these communities, people intermingle two languages, using whichever best expresses their meaning. This does not necessarily reflect limited English skills. Fully bilingual speakers make choices about when, where, and how to integrate English into their language use.

There are other important reasons to incorporate shared languages into the classroom. For one, it validates the use of native languages as means of communication. In a society that discourages all but standard English, it seems important for us to accept the use of every communication tool we have at our disposal, including all languages, our face and bodies, drawings, mime, etc. To block the natural impulse to use native languages not only shifts the emphasis away from genuine communication, but puts the teacher in the role of imposing English on the group. This contradicts our efforts to encourage self-determination and self-advocacy among learners. Second, the content of class discussions and writings are richer when both languages are used. The freedom to code-switch invites people to participate more fully, expressing themselves in greater depth and supportung one another as a community. Without this option, the class is often dominated by the more confident learners, while others become passive observers.

The inclusion of native languages creates an invitation for all to participate, even in classrooms where many native languages are represented. They can be helpful in peer learning, in cultural sharing, and in the development of literacy skills (see section on Native Language Literacy). It becomes the job of the teacher to develop English language activities that expand upon the writings and discussions that occur in dominant languages.

There are many views on why, when, and how to incorporate native languages into the English class. Like most other issues we have discussed, there are no answers that exist outside the classroom context. Teachers who think about these questions with learners will soon find out that the students, themselves, have their own standards of when their shared language should be used in the classroom. They will set and enforce their own limits on when, why, and how it is used. Often it is the source of on-going debate within the class. Through this issue, learners grapple with a variety of broader language use issues, such as the suppression of their language in society, their ambivalence about having to learn a second language (and even about being in this country), their feelings about their own languages, their fears about learning, and on and on. It's only by trusting their judgment as equals that teachers can learn about the dilemmas of this community.

El Vecindario/The Neighborhood

Two-way bilingualism in the ESL classroom

Every picture tells a story, so it goes, but not always the same story. The following is an account of an activity that backfired or that "moved" in its own direction. It is also a good illustration of what happens when teachers "let go" of their own ideas and agenda, and let the class direct itself.

It was towards the end of the cycle in our FOCUS class (a special photography and literacy class) and I was concerned that nobody was really writing or taking pictures about things other than people. I thought it would be interesting if we all took pictures of our neighborhoods and wrote about them. I was also interested in getting the students to try to write on a series of pictures, to get beyond just writing one page per picture. I was interested in seeing them create and develop their writing around a certain theme and also to see if they could or would write about something personal which wasn't necessarily about themselves or their family. Hence the neighborhood idea.

I decided I should model what I had in mind so that they would be very clear about what I expected. Also, I wanted to participate in the class as a picture-taker, not just as a writer/teacher. So I set out with my Polaroid to take pictures of the things I saw on my way to and from my daughter's daycare center.

I found myself attracted to the different kinds of gardens in my nieghborhood. I wanted to expose the sharp contrast of wealth and poverty in my neighborhood as seen through its gardens—from the exclusive manicured condo-gardens to the Chinese vegetable victory gardens.

My plan was to bring in my photos, talk about them, tell the class why I took them and then give them their own cameras and hope they would go out and do something different. This is not what happened. What did happen was something quite wonderful and surprising. It was wonderful because it happened in Spanish and surprising because I never could have predicted or planned it. Instead of showing and telling the students about the pictures I had taken, as planned, I asked them what they saw when looking at them as a group. This open approach allowed each student to see and express what she saw in the picture. One student, for example, said in looking at my picture of the victory garden that this reminded her of her father; that they used to have a garden like this and that her father had died in a garden like this on her birthday. We were all quite taken aback by this sudden and serious comment, but while I was searching around for something comforting and appropriate to say, it seemed as if others had picked up on the idea that these pictures reminded them of gardens back in their countries. They all agreed that my pictures of the fountain and detailed iron work (originally representing my view of the wealthy) looked like parts of Old San Juan and that this made them feel homesick. They became quite animated and I could tell they wanted to continue talking about this in Spanish. I gave them "permission" to continue to speak in Spanish and only interrupted a few times to get clarification for myself, since my Spanish was still very rudimentary. This was the first time they had spoken at length in front of me. In the past, they would have only done this with Beatriz, my co-teacher who is Puertorican. We were all truly defining and acting out a "bilingual participatory project" because it was a two-way bilingual class.

I was thrilled, nervous and unsure of what to do next since my original lesson plan had evolved into something else. All I knew was this was where the energy was, and that the writing could come from this. So I asked them if they wanted to write some of their ideas down. They said yes. I told them to write in whichever language they felt like. Beatriz and I have always given the students the choice to decide which language to write in. In the past when we have done this, Beatriz would

read and give feedback to those who wrote in Spanish and I would do the same for those who wrote in English.

This photos reflect the antiquity of
the capital of my country (Puerto Rico)

Its old streets, but historic,
its churches full of memories,
that the century cannot erase.
It's a memory I have in my heart.

I never forget, and they make you long
for your country.

It's beautiful to remember something
you think is forgotten.

I know now everybody can't forget
their roots, like me.

— Blanca (Tita) Marzan

Esto refleja la antiguedad de la capital
de mi país (Puerto Rico).

Sus calles viejas, pero históricas y sus
iglésias llenas de recuerdos,
que ni los siglos han podido borrar.
Son remembranzas que uno lleva en el corazón.

Nunca se pueden olvidar, y que te hacen
revivir y añorar a tu pátria.

Es bonito recordar cosas que uno creía
olvidadas. Yo sé ahora que nadie puede
olvidar sus raices, igual que yo.

— Blanca (Tita) Marzan

At the end of ten minutes, I asked if people needed more time. Everyone said yes, so we all wrote for another ten minutes. I feel it is important to give people time limits so they feel secure initially but I always ask them if they want more time. It is yet another way to create a participatory sense of class management. I wrote also because I was anxious to tell them my interpretation of my pictures. When everyone stopped writing, I suggested that we read our writings aloud. Everyone agreed but looked a little bashful and uncomfortable. They all had written in Spanish except for Angel, who wrote in English about me, the photographer, who had taken a picture of a Jesus statue. I told them this was no problem and I would ask for clarification when I needed it.

There is no adequate way for me to explain or express what happened next. We all read our pieces, laughed and made comments to each other. This was a very empowering and vulnerable experience for me; to be listening to my students read to me in Spanish. I felt vulnerable because I could not be their teacher in the old sense and offer corrections in either Spanish or English. I also felt vulnerable because my Spanish was not great, so I really had to listen and sometimes ask a lot of questions. Yet, I felt empowered because I felt they were now treating me like an equal by not

trying to please me by writing in English. The class had reached that level of intimacy one always hopes for; so much so that they were able to discuss with both interest and understanding Maria's struggle to write in Spanish, and why she would rather make mistakes in English than lose face writing in her semi-literate Spanish.

After we had all read our pieces aloud, I admitted to them the surprising turn my lesson had taken and how surprised Iwas at first that my pictures of my neighborhood looked like places in their home countries. I also felt it was important for me to tell about how I felt listening to them talk and read in Spanish. We all agreed that my Spanish had improved over the course of the class, but also that this had been a very special class.

L.M.

Native Language Literacy

Native language literacy is an area that is drawing increasing attention in the field of adult education. We began to consider it when we observed the difficulty learners who didn't have basic native language literacy skills were having with English literacy. It is also an issue that came up when we discussed our teaching priorities. We were primarily concerned with learners achieving their own goals and finding their own voices. Many feel that their true voice must first be expressed in their native language. English literacy may be functional, but it is not an adequate tool for non-native speakers to express their deepest thoughts and dreams. Nor does it enable them to fully participate in their own language communities. To achieve these complementary goals, we have encouraged interested learners to develop literacy in the first language. Literacy skills are transferable. Once people experience the options that literacy allows them, they will want access to the information and choice that English literacy offers.

Popular Education

Bringing native language literacy to the community

First language literacy becomes a controversial issue in some ESL settings. In some settings there is a perception of learners' needs that excludes any education in the learners' language. In other settings those that are running the organization feel unable to undertake the task. It is too complicated, or so they say. To avoid these controversies especially at the administrative level, I decided to go into the South End community of Spanish speakers and to propose to them, directly, a literacy class in Spanish. I sent letters and flyers to different rectories, social service agencies and health centers, but I did not get a great response. My next step was to walk into the neighborhood and attend community meetings. And that did work.

At these community meetings, I met a woman who referred me to the housing development where she said I could meet people interested in literacy classes in Spanish. I contacted them immediately and set up a meeting with those interested in the classes. This was a new way of recruiting people that avoided controversy at the ESL setting where I worked and it also drew the attention of the people in the South End that did not attend classes at our program. A population of learners that we were not serving was reached through this kind of recruitment.

I had many expectations for the first meeting with the potential participants in the literacy class. I thought optimistically that in this one meeting I would be able to tap into the themes in their lives that could be later addressed in the class. But one meeting is not enough to address these goals. They are just too broad.

Our first meeting was in the community of the housing development. There were at least twelve or fourteen people at the meeting. We introduced ourselves and shared with the group the reasons we came to the meeting. Many were happy with the idea of the literacy class in Spanish. Others expressed mixed feelings because English is what they said they needed the most. For those interested in ESL I said they could attend classes at El Centro which is just two blocks away from the housing development. I was there to do literacy in Spanish. Those who were interested remained and we agreed on a time and place for the class. We would meet in the dining room of an apartment at 2 p.m. every Monday, Wednesday and Thursday.

Somehow, somewhere I knew that the tenants in the building were divided before I even came there. But with the literacy class, I could see how this division was exacerbated. Sooner or later in the course of the class I knew I would have to facilitate a discussion of this tension. I got this feeling of tension around certain issues from the way potential learners asserted themselves about literacy in Spanish. Those that stayed appeared to me as having known that they were going to stay even before I posed the question of who was interested in the literacy classes.

At the beginning of these classes everybody was very happy and pleased with the idea of attending classes in their own space. Living up to this level of energy became a real challenge to me. I looked for readings, pictures, and literacy activities that would allow me to get to the issues in their lives. The class was composed mostly of Puertoricans. There was only one Mexican. There were people who could read some while there were others who could not sign their names. There were more women than men. It was a real challenge!

I started classes by bringing excerpts from a book by Moema Viezzer and Domitila Chungara called *Si me permiten hablar* . . . This book is about a woman who shares a story that reflects the story of Bolivian people living and working in the mines. I had hoped that these excerpts would voice some of the learners' experiences. And they did. When Domitila shared memories of her

childhoods, the learners volunteered theirs as well. The literacy activities I designed captured these memories in writing. Those who did not read or write had language experience stories that became their reading texts. Interestingly enough no one expressed concerns about spelling or correctness of language.

I addressed some of the issues that they brought up with more stories. Women in the class spoke about their childhood, and why they had not been able to attend school. To address this I brought another story, this time about a Puertorican woman voicing her experience. The men and women in the class discussed this and came to the conclusion that women were discriminated against. But they also said that historically Puertorican and Mexican men and women had also been discriminated against.

The subject of discrimination moved the class discussion back to the housing development and how some issues divided the tenants in the building. The tenants in the building who spoke Spanish and did not participate in the class were curious about our work, said the learners. I could see them walking by the apartment every time we were there. Sometimes they would even stop and would inquire about our whereabouts. Some of the learners had shared with them some of the things we had done in class.

It was very clear at this point that the class needed to communicate with the other tenants in the building. Individual voices did not solve this issue, agreed the class. They thought that a joint writing publication could be the answer. I suggested a newsletter. They agreed and discussed a name for the newsletter or "boletin." The name is "Residentes Unidos" and it is produced monthly with pieces of writing from people in the class. To maintain direct communication with the other tenants in the building they set up a box for letters to "Residentes Unidos." But we have not received a letter, yet.

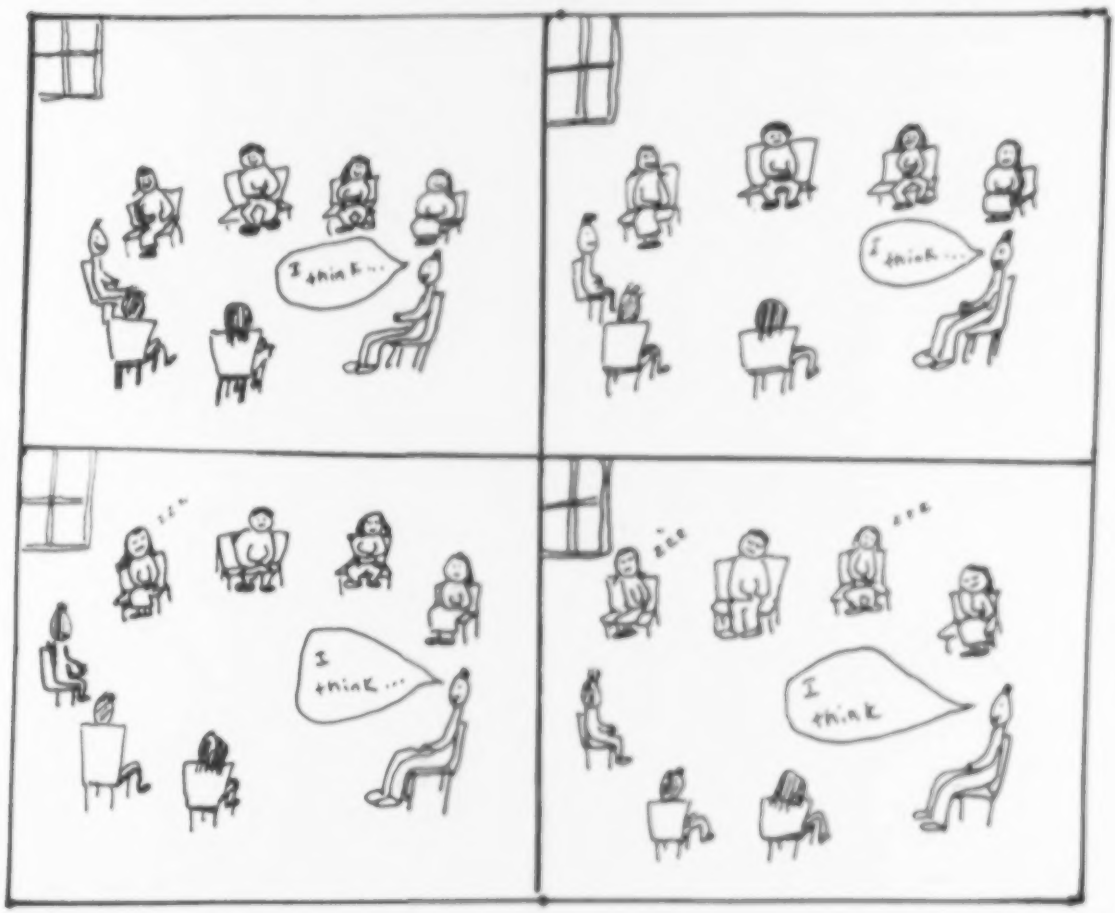
R.G-S.

Group Dynamics

Developing curriculum around class participation

Comfortable group dynamics and the participation of all students are essential and elusive factors in any English class, and are especially important in a class developing a student-generated curriculum. Unless all students feel comfortable sharing their issues, ideas and experiences, the curriculum will be heavily weighted toward the needs of the more vocal students. However, it is also important to me as a teacher, while encouraging an atmosphere of respect and participation of all class members, to allow for differences in individual personalities and in culture, and not to push any one person too hard.

The issue of class participation emerged for one class in a mid-cycle evaluation. Several students mentioned in their written evaluation that "some students never talk," "They need to say something," and "The teacher should make some people be quiet and others talk." I felt it was important to have an open discussion with students about what the groundrules of the class should be and how I can best facilitate more/better class participation. So I brought in this cartoon:



I began by asking students to look at the cartoon and figure out what was happening in the four frames. Everybody had ideas. Students interpreted the scene as a family gathering, a Communist Party meeting in Laos, an all-student, all-staff meeting at Jackson-Mann, and a classroom. We talked a little about these possibilities and focused in on our own class. We talked generally about who talks in the class and who doesn't and then about why people do or don't feel comfortable speaking up. One student said that he likes to listen to others and learn from them. Others talked about their fears of learning English. One student mentioned that there should be rules about how long each class member can talk, but after some discussion we decided that every person doesn't need to talk for exactly the same amount of time. It is more important that we all respect whoever wants to speak and respect opinions that are different from our own. We didn't resolve anything in a cut-and dried way, but we did all become aware of the issue and the fact that this awareness is probably more important than any fixed set of rules we can impose.

The next step in this lesson was for students to interview each other about group situations in which they had participated. (See attached interview.) This was enlightening as people shared experiences that they hadn't before shared in class. A woman from Syria talked about organizing the women she worked with in a bank to fight for maternity leave. Another student talked about working with family members in order to save money to come to the U.S. Another talked about organizing a Catholic youth group. In this way, people recognized themselves and their classmates as experienced in working in groups and strong in different settings. This new view of each other as leaders in our own communities/families gave us incentive to listen more carefully to what each person had to contribute to the class.

In reflecting more upon this lesson, I think it was valuable to both recognize an expressed student concern and to bring the issue back to the class. If I were to do a similar lesson again, I would spread the lesson over more than one day and spend more time on discussion. I would like to ask students to do some writing in class or to do a language experience story about class dynamics, respect, etc. so that we could save this story and look back and reflect upon it during the rest of the cycle. Since this lesson I've spent more time talking with individual students about how they feel in the class. I've also become more comfortable with using my teaching role to establish, from the beginning, some explicit and simple groundrules of respect.

A.C.

Evaluation

Meaningful evaluation of ESL classes and students can be an elusive goal to achieve. What is to be evaluated? By whom? For what purpose? Much of the evaluation done by ESL teachers has been designed to collect quantitative data about students for funders. But there is growing support for alternative assessment models that include learners in evaluating their own progress toward their own goals, and which better reflect the myriad ways learning happens in non-quantifiable terms. Evaluations that not only satisfy funding sources but also document qualitative accomplishments and contribute to the learning process of both students and teachers (and hopefully funders as well) are worth the time and energy they require to develop.

Given the opportunity to create our own evaluation tools, we have attempted to develop methods that are consistent with our participatory teaching approach, incorporating student goals and opinions into the process. It has been impossible to separate evaluations of individuals from evaluation of classes, teachers, and programs, since they are inextricably related. Though our assessment tools may attempt to focus on one or another of these categories, we have found that a thorough examination of "progress," however that may be defined, inevitably draws in all of the components that shape the learning experience.

Our tools have been varied and experimental, but all have been built around two basic questions: "How is or isn't the class meeting your needs?" and "How do you assess your learning and the impact it is having on your life (both in and out of class)?" In order to answer these questions, we have discovered that teachers and classes must work closely to assess not only individual progress, but class structure, format, group dynamics, and teaching styles as well.

Based on this approach, we as a project have utilized a wide range of evaluation techniques with our classes. Unlike the pre- and post-test model, we have tried to incorporate evaluation into the on-going activities of the class. For example, one class used a weekly class summary, written by the teacher, as a vehicle for discussing student accomplishments and reactions to various learning activities. We have also used individual student-teacher conferences, peer interviews about class needs, journal writing, and student surveys to elicit dialogue about the effectiveness of class. Individual advancement has been considered by looking at writing folders, class participation, and the innumerable daily achievements that teachers have begun to document. Some centers also conduct program evaluations, at which students can share information and voice opinions about such topics as class structure, content, use of native language in class, adult education program offerings, childcare, tutors, and the need to put more pressure on funders to provide resources to community programs.

There are two immediate advantages we see in using such alternative methods. First, consistent with our participatory philosophy, students assume greater control within this process and are not merely the subjects of observation and judgment. Second, this form of assessment gives teachers and students immediate and useful feedback about the effectiveness of their learning and teaching. Unlike end-of-cycle evaluations, which provide this information to participants after they can use it, periodic feedback allows for on-going adjustment in class. This responsiveness to learners is one of our primary goals.

"Our Class"
A weekly literacy ritual

I have found that class rituals are an important component of my classes. By ritual, I mean some regular activity—a predictable sequence of events that everyone anticipates and understands. It may be daily announcements, weekly journal writing, monthly class evaluations, or any other patterned activity. Whatever it is, its very regularity gives learners information and therefore some control in the classroom.

Rituals also provide structure in an environment that, in a traditional sense, appears to lack structure. The participatory approach requires a certain flexibility in adapting to needs and concerns as they arise in the classroom. Course curriculum and goals are negotiated along the way and this may, at times, feel uncomfortable for learners who prefer a textbook, fixed syllabus, and other symbols of a familiar classroom environment. Rituals can address their concerns by focusing the group and providing continuity to the class.

I got my favorite ritual from Helen Jones, an ABE teacher. It is a class summary that I call "Class Accomplishments" or "Our Class" depending on the language level of the group. The summary, which I write at the end of each week, recounts not only what happened in class, but what is happening in people's lives. In this way, the ritual has a bonding function for the group, connecting people as well as activities from day to day.

The summary serves our class on many levels. To begin with, it makes a wonderful reading activity because it is predictable—people already know what they did the week before, even if they don't know all the words to describe it. The fact that they know, basically, what the reading is going to say, gives them a context for understanding and responding to the text, identifying new vocabulary and language structures. "Our Class" also provides a natural opportunity to review language work and rekindle discussions that may have only been started the week before. And the personal references make this a "high-interest" reading. Everyone reads eagerly, looking for mention of themselves and their friends.

Each week I include a reference to each class member in some way—a quote, a personal story, concern for their absence, etc. so that we are all part of this documented memory. People whose voices customarily go by unnoticed by the group find themselves quoted in detail. The attention is validating and shows people that they are being heard. It unites the group as a community that listens and responds to one another.

While I see this as the most important function of "Our Class," it has some other, practical uses as well. Writing can easily be integrated into the ritual. Over time, learners can take on the writing of larger and larger chunks of the review until, at some point, they become responsible for the entire text. In my classes, this shift usually begins, quite naturally, when I am absent or otherwise occupied and they must fill me in on class happenings.

I have also used "Our Class" to discuss various aspects of writing. For example, I've written Monday's account in very dry and undetailed language and then Tuesday's account with lots of description, q[illegible]s from the class, and personal anecdotes. We discuss the differences, similarities, which we thought better and why.

Finally, the summary can be used as a class evaluation tool. Instead of evaluating classes at the end, when it's too late to make changes in their form or content, "Our Class" can prompt ongoing reflection about which activities are most useful for them and why, whether they are happy with the direction the class has taken, what their suggestions are, etc. "Our Class" helps people think

about these questions by reminding us of what we have done in class. But, more than that, it identifies the great amount of learning that has occurred; it reassures learners that they can learn English while they are learning about and from each other. As a teacher, this is the importance of "Our Class" in my classes—to acknowledge all of our accomplishments and inspire us to keep exploring and working together.

A.N.

Our Class - week #1

Last week, two new students joined our class - Rosa and Zoila. They are both from Guatemala. They both have six children (like Maria and Concha) and they have grandchildren.

Zoila is looking for a studio apartment. Carlos just moved again (the third time in two months) and now he lives on Beacon Street.

On Wednesday, we read a story about Rose Sullivan. She is a divorced mother with two daughters. She was married for nine years but she was unhappy.

We talked about divorce. Zoila said that people say bad things about divorced women in Latin countries. In the US, divorce is more common and accepted. But many women with children stay married because they depend on their husbands economically. This is a big problem for mothers in the U.S.

Class Accomplishments (week of 2/1-2/4)

This week, we started out with two days of 100% attendance. That's impressive. But on Wednesday, we had only five people and Thursday, due to the snowstorm, only Juan, Ramiro, Carmen, and Andy came to class. Unfortunately, Juan and Ramiro arrived late and Carmen and Andy had already joined another class, so the guys met with Jonathan instead. For the week, there were a total of 24 attendances, or 75%. That's much better than last week.

On Monday, I returned your papers, ~~with~~ typed up with blanks where you needed to correct the errors. I also asked you some questions about your stories. Zoila and Camila, who had been absent when we wrote these stories, spent most of class writing their memories of school. Then we did a listening exercise. I read a sentence and everyone (in pairs) tried to write exactly what I said. This was difficult but fun.

On Tuesday, we read two stories about people who had trouble in school. George Medding and James Arrow were their names. George's teacher said he was hard-headed, and James' teacher treated him like a piece of furniture. After the stories, we read excerpts from our own experiences in school. Then, in pairs, the class thought of a list of reasons that kids have trouble learning in school. Here is the list:

Teachers don't pay attention to kids
Teachers ignore kids who aren't doing well
Kids are scared of teachers. Some teachers hit kids
Teachers are too strict and mean
Teachers aren't understanding
Teachers don't listen to kids
Kids don't like to study
Kids have vices - smoking, drinking, drugs
Family problems
Kids have to work and don't have time to study

Wednesday, we read about three different teachers. Each one had a different style of teaching. I ~~in~~ listed four problems on the board that kids might have. In groups, we thought of ways each teacher might respond to the problem. We will correct these lists next week. We discussed them in class. It was clear that people didn't like Mr. C. too much.

(continued)

All-Program Evaluations

Assessing how we're doing in and beyond the classroom

During my three years of teaching at Jackson Mann Community School and working with the Family Literacy Project, the forms and methods of evaluation I use with ESL students have greatly evolved. The clearest insight I have reached about evaluations and assessments is that they must be ongoing and must include assessments of all levels of a program by all participants. For me, one of the keys to learning about my teaching and about students' needs has been Jackson Mann all-program evaluations.

Once a cycle (about three times a year), the entire Adult Education Program at our community school is invited to participate in program evaluations. These evaluations include students from ABE, GED, Next-Step (post GED) and ESL classes, as well as volunteers and paid staff members. The group comes together to talk about how classes are going, what needs are/are not being met, issues that have come up in the classroom, and changes that need to be made. In the past specific questions that have arisen include student retention rates, funding for more classes and more hours, use of native languages in the class, the desperate need for childcare, and the role of volunteer tutors. The exciting aspect of these evaluations, however, is not just specific issues that are discussed. What makes these sessions really valuable is the beginning of a shift of control. Decisions about hiring, program hours, etc. do not take place only among teachers and administrators. Instead, a dialogue between students in different classes, between students in different program components, and among students, volunteers and staff opens up. It is a challenge to examine how much control we are willing to relinquish, how well we can act on the expressed needs of all program participants, and how we can be truly participatory and strike a balance between student goals, our own desires not to burn out, and funding requirements and constraints.

The benefits of the entire program sitting down together are enormous. The opportunity that this format provides for students in different classes to realize their common concerns makes it safer for people to give honest criticism and feedback about the classes. Program participants seem to feel more comfortable talking about their classes when they are not in the class itself. And rich exchanges between students give teachers a lot of food for thought. One such exchange which led to concrete changes in our program centered on the issue of class levels and placement. Students in the evening ESL classes said that the level in their class was too mixed and that they were not placed according to their skills. A discussion ensued about the assessment used when students initially come to the program to register for English classes, and we asked for feedback on how we could make the assessment more accurate. While we didn't get a lot of feedback on that particular assessment instrument, we did institute mid-cycle individual conferences with students in all levels of the program to talk about how they felt about their own progress and how the class was meeting their needs. In addition, tutors, as well as advanced students involved in the classes, have begun to participate in ESL registration which has been helpful in adding another voice to judge the appropriateness of levels and placements. The very fact that this discussion took place and changes were made was valuable in that it led to students becoming more vocal about how well a particular class was suited to their needs.

Other program-wide changes which have occurred were brought about through a discussion of the amount of class time offered each week. One student insisted that we offer more intensive English classes (four nights a week as opposed to three). This had been a repeated request, and some other students agreed that they needed four nights in a row in order to really progress. However, there were other ideas among program participants. Some students who were active in

Tuesday Night drop-in recommended that students take advantage of it and come to practice conversation or work on other skills in an informal atmosphere. A woman in the group said that students often miss classes when they are offered three nights per week, that it did not make sense to add another day. She said that it is much easier for the men in a class to study because they don't have the same family responsibilities with childcare that women do. She said that she missed classes because of problems with her babysitting arrangements. Students who participated in the program for a couple of cycles pointed out that the teachers have a lot of responsibilities aside from any one class and that it wasn't fair or possible to expect them to teach another class another night. These kinds of multi-issue discussions resurfaced throughout the year, and various solutions have been worked out with different people at different times. One teacher, in fact, did elect to teach four nights a week for a cycle. Students organized a peer-run conversation group to meet once a week, and circulated sign-up sheets and scheduled it among themselves. Childcare for evening class became a program priority and we began a childcare arrangement (first with students all chipping in) and were eventually funded by a grant from the Bank of Boston for this essential support service. In addition, teachers have become a little more open in sharing with students the demands of the adult education world and what is required to keep the program operating.

A second positive aspect of this open forum for assessing the program is the opportunity it provides for students who study in different parts of the Adult Education Program to learn a little bit about each other's struggles and achievements in learning. Students who are recent immigrants to the United States obtain a new perspective on the educational system here as they meet with students who were born in this country but have faced many barriers to achieving their educational goals. At the same time, native English speakers are able to learn more about the obstacles ESL students, many of them undocumented, face around basic issues of survival. The different classes and communities of students find that they share some goals and that some of their needs are very different. With a clearer idea of who the whole community of students is at Jackson Mann, participants have a better understanding of some of the possibilities as well as limitations we face in making decisions about class time, program structure, etc. Thus it is easier, when students become active on hiring committees, speak at hearings for more funding, and help make decisions about priorities for time and funding, for them to be informed about people's needs and choices.

Another area of the program which has evolved due in part to discussions begun at program evaluations concerns volunteer staff who work at Jackson Mann. At one session a tutor brought up her concern that she felt underutilized in the class and that she wanted students to feel comfortable talking with her and relying on her as a resource person. A student responded that it was important for her to become active in the class and approach students as they often felt shy talking with someone in English. This conversation was relatively brief, but pointed to a programmatic need for more orientation with tutors as to the range of ways they could participate in classes; increased dialogue between teachers and tutors to determine how volunteers feel about their role in the classroom; and more work with students so that they also see the tutor as an active participant and not just a resource person. Though we as a program have experienced many ups and downs in our volunteer part of the program, we have striven to create more opportunities for tutors to share experiences among themselves and more time for all class participants to have input into the most beneficial role each of us can play. We continue to struggle with how to handle our need for a volunteer coordinator when we are not funded for this position.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of all-program evaluations is the catalyst they provide to spark on-going assessment of the Adult Education Program. Participants in these discussions have a clearer idea of the needs of individuals as well as the needs, goals, and constraints of the program as a whole. We hope they have a better understanding of the participatory philosophy of the program

in which they are involved as well. Invariably there are some issues that arise each cycle and we struggle with different ways to resolve them. There are new issues which arise as well and there are positive critiques which people share. These evaluations provide a different context from the classroom that sometimes stimulates more honest, open feedback. They are, moreover, a reference point to which we can all refer back during the year to determine how well we are meeting the communities' needs.

A.C.

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